FOUR LITTLE BLOSSOMS AND THEIR WINTER FUN

Mabel C. Hawley

To- Margaret Ann
from
Mrs Morlon

"Happy Birthday"
Mch. 14. 1942

The snow man was so tall that Bobby could not reach the top of his head without a chair.

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FOUR LITTLE BLOSSOMS AND THEIR WINTER FUN

BY

MABEL C. HAWLEY

AUTHOR OF "FOUR LITTLE BLOSSOMS AT BROOKSIDE FARM," "FOUR LITTLE BLOSSOMS AT OAK HILL SCHOOL," ETC.

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Four Little Blossoms and Their Winter Fun

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FOUR LITTLE BLOSSOMS AND THEIR WINTER FUN

CHAPTER I

THE FIRST SNOW-STORM

"WHERE'S Mother?" Meg and Bobby Blossom demanded the moment they opened the front door.

It was the first question they always asked when they came home from school.

Twaddles, their little brother, looked up at them serenely from the sofa cushion on which he sat cross-legged on the floor at the foot of the hall stairs.

"Mother and Aunt Polly went uptown," he informed his brother and sister. "They're going to bring us something nice. They promised."

Meg pulled off her hat and unbuttoned her coat.

"I'm starving," she announced. "It's awfully cold out. What are you doing anyway, Twaddles?"

"Sliding down the banisters," answered Twaddles calmly. "See, we spread down sofa cushions so 's we wouldn't hurt ourselves. It's Dot's turn now. Hi, Dot!" he ended in a shout.

"Here I come—look out!" With a swish of pink gingham skirt a small, plump little girl came flying down the banister to land luckily on a red satin sofa cushion ready to receive her.

"Well, I must say," announced Meg with dignity, "that's a fine way to do—using Mother's best sofa cushions! Where's Norah?"

"Gone to the movies," replied Dot, pushing the hair out of her eyes and smiling sunnily. "She waited till she saw you turn the corner, 'cause she said she wouldn't leave us alone."

Twaddles, who had been pressing his short nose against the glass in the door panel hoping to see his mother coming with the promised gift, suddenly wheeled and tried to stand on his head. That was Twaddles' way of expressing delight.

"It's snowing!" he cried. "Little fine snowflakes, the kind that Daddy says always last. Oh, I hope we have coasting. I'll bet it snows all night."

"You said that Thanksgiving," retorted Bobby gloomily, "and it just snowed enough to cover the ground one night and melted 'fore we were up the next morning. And here it is January, and it hasn't snowed since."

"'Sides the sled is busted," agreed Twaddles mournfully, quite willing to be melancholy if some one would show him the way. "Even if it did snow, we couldn't have any fun without a sled."

"I guess we can mend it, maybe," interposed Meg cheerfully. "I'm going out and get some bread and peanut butter. Who wants some?"

They all did, it seemed, even Dot and Twaddles, who were too young to go to school, but who managed to have famous appetites as regularly as the older children. Mother Blossom allowed them to have what Norah called a "snack" every afternoon after school, and Meg was always careful to see that they ate only the things permitted and that no one dipped into the cake box.

"Look how white!" cried Dot, finishing her bread and butter first, and kneeling on a kitchen

chair to see out of the window. "The ground is all covered already and you can see feetsteps."

"Footsteps," corrected Bobby, taking a last large bite of his lunch.

"Shoesteps," insisted Meg, closing the pantry door and putting away the bread.

"That isn't a shoestep," argued Bobby, pointing to a particularly clear and distinct print in the snow just outside the window.

"'Tis, too," scolded Meg. "That's where Sam went out to the garage."

"'Tisn't a shoestep, 'tisn't a shoestep!" chanted Bobby, bent on teasing.

Meg's fair face flushed. She was exasperated.

"What is it, then?" she snapped.

Bobby measured the distance to the hall door.

"A rubberstep!" he shouted triumphantly. "Sam wore his rubbers! Yah!"

"You think you're smart!" said Meg, half laughing and half frowning. "Just you wait, Bobby Blossom!"

She darted for him, but Bobby was too quick. He dashed out into the hall, Meg following, and Dot and Twaddles trailing after them. Shriek-

ing and shouting, the four raced into the dining-room, tore twice around the table, then into the long living-room, where Meg managed to corner Bobby under the old-fashioned square piano.

They had forgotten to be angry by this time, and after she had tickled him till he begged for mercy—Bobby was extremely ticklish—they crawled out again, disheveled and panting, and were ready for something new.

"I'm going to get some snow," declared Dot, beginning to raise one of the windows.

"Don't! You'll freeze Mother's plants," warned Meg. "Dot Blossom, don't you dare open that window!"

For answer Dot gave a final push and the sash shot up and locked half way.

"Oh, it's love-ly!" cried Dot, leaning out and scooping up a handful of the beautiful, soft, white stuff. "Just like feathers, Meg."

"You'll be a feather if you don't come in," growled Bobby sternly. "Look out!"

Dot, leaning out further to sweep the sill clean, had slipped and was going headlong when Bobby grasped her skirts. He pulled her back,

unhurt, except for a scratch on her nose from a bit of the vine clinging to the house wall and a ruffled disposition.

"You leave me alone!" she blazed. "You've hurt my knee."

"Want to fall on your head?" demanded Bobby, justly indignant. "All right, if that's the way you feel about it, I'll give you something to be mad about."

Before the surprised Dot could protest, he had seized her firmly around the neck and, holding her tightly (Bobby was very sturdy for his seven years), he proceeded to wash her face with a handful of snow he hastily scooped from the window sill. Dot was furious, but, though she struggled and squirmed, she could not get free.

"Now you'll be good," said Bobby, giving her a sounding kiss as he let her go, for he was very fond of his headstrong little sister. "Want your face washed, Twaddles?"

There was a sudden rush for the window and Meg and Twaddles and Dot armed themselves with handfuls of snow. Dot made for Twaddles, for she saw more chance of being able to

capture him, and Bobby had designs on Meg.

"Glory be! Where to now?" Norah's cry came from the pantry as four pairs of stout shoes thundered through her kitchen and up the back stairs. Norah, if the children had stopped long enough to hear, would have told them that she had hurried home to start supper after seeing the "episode" of the serial picture she was interested in at the motion picture house.

Dot sounded like a husky young Indian as she hurled herself upon Twaddles in the center of Aunt Polly's carefully made bed in the guest-room and rubbed what was left of her handful of snow into his eyes and mouth.

"My, it's wet," he sputtered. "Let go, Dot! Ow! you're standing on my finger."

Meg had dashed into her mother's room, and, banging the door in Bobby's face, turned the key. She was safe!

Bobby had no intention of being defeated. When he heard the key turn in the door he looked about for a way to outwit Meg. He might be able to climb through the transom if he could get a ladder or a chair.

His own room was next to his mother's, and, turning in there to get a chair, he saw the window. It opened on the roof of the porch, as did the windows in his mother's room. What could be simpler than to walk along the roof of the porch, raise a window and get in? He could gather up more snow, too, as he went along, and just wouldn't he wash Meg's face for her!

"What you going to do?" asked Twaddles, as Bobby hoisted his window.

Dot and Twaddles, tiring of their own fracas, had come in search of Meg and Bobby.

"You wait and you'll see," answered Bobby mysteriously, putting one leg over the sill.

Dot and Twaddles crowded into the open window to watch him as he picked his way along. There was a linen closet between the two rooms, so Bobby had some space to cover before he came to the windows of the room where Meg was hiding.

"My goodness!" whispered that small girl to herself, parting the white curtains to look out as she heard footsteps on the porch roof. "He might fall; it's ever so slippery!"

It was slippery; in fact, the roof was much harder to walk on than Bobby had suspected. For one thing, the roof sloped, and he had to cling to the side of the house as he walked; then, too, the fine driving snow almost blinded him; and a third reason that made it hard going was the way the snow caked and clung to his shoes.

He had reached the window where Meg was waiting, so interested in watching him that she had forgotten why he was coming, and he stooped for a handful of fresh snow. Meg grinned cheerfully at him as he straightened up.

"I'll let you in," she called through the glass, beginning to push up the window.

Bobby reached out to get a good grip on the window frame, missed the ledge and lost his balance. His foot slipped as he threw out his arms to save himself.

CHAPTER II

BOBBY IS RESCUED

BEFORE the frightened gaze of three pairs of eyes Bobby slid backward over the edge of the porch roof, out of sight.

"He'll be killed!" sobbed Meg, dashing for the door.

She unlocked it and fled down the hall, followed by Dot and Twaddles.

"What is it? What is it?" screamed Norah, as she caught a glimpse of Meg's white face from the dining-room where she was beginning to set the supper table. "Has anything happened to any of ye?"

Meg was already out of the front door. Norah caught up her red shawl and ran after her.

Norah had lived with the Blossoms ever since Bobby was a baby. He was now seven years old. There were four little Blossoms now, and never a dispute about the "baby of the family," for there were two of them! Dot and Twaddles were twins, you see. They were four years old,

but liked to be considered older, as many of the younger children do.

If you have read the first book of this series, called "Four Little Blossoms at Brookside Farm," you already know many of their friends, and above all their Aunt Polly Hayward, who was their mother's older sister. Brookside Farm was Aunt Polly's home, and the four children spent a beautiful summer there with her and learned about farm life and were given a calf, "Carlotta," for their very own. This first book, too, explains about the real names of the four little Blossoms. Bobby was Robert Hayward Blossom, Meg's right name Margaret Alice, like her mother's, and Dot's, Dorothy Anna. Twaddles had a very nice name, too, Arthur Gifford Blossom, and no one ever knew why he was called Twaddles. It seemed to suit him, somehow.

The Blossoms, Father and Mother Blossom and the four children, lived in a town called Oak Hill, where Father Blossom owned a large foundry at one end of the town. Meg and Bobby, of course, went to school. You may have read

the book before this one, called "Four Little Blossoms at Oak Hill School," which tells about the troubles Bobby encountered and how he came safely through them, and of how the twins were so eager to go to school that they finally did in spite of the fact that they were only four years old. If you read that book you will remember that Aunt Polly came down to visit Mother Blossom over Thanksgiving and went to the school exercises to hear Meg and Bobby recite. She stayed for Christmas, too. And finally, because every one loved her very much and because she had no little people of her own at Brookside, she yielded to the persuasion of Father and Mother Blossom and promised to spend the rest of the winter in Oak Hill.

Besides Norah, there lived with the Blossoms Sam Layton, who ran Father Blossom's car and did all the outside work about the place; Philip, a very intelligent and amiable dog, and Annabel Lee, an affectionate and much beloved cat. Dear me, Twaddles had some rabbits, too. He would want you to know those. And now that you are

properly introduced, let us go and see what happened to Bobby.

Meg fell down every one of the front steps in her anxiety to reach her brother, and Norah alone saved the twins from a like fall. They tumbled into her and the three held each other up. At least that is the way Twaddles explained it.

"Bobby! Oh, Bobby, are you dead?" wailed Meg, looking, for some inexplicable reason, toward the porch roof. Of course Bobby couldn't be up there when he had fallen off.

"Of course I'm not dead," the indignant voice of Bobby assured her. "I'm all right, not hurt a bit. But I'm stuck in this old bush."

He had had the good fortune, for he might have been seriously hurt if he had struck the ground, to tumble into a large bush planted a short distance from the porch. This bush had not been trimmed for years, and new shoots had grown up and mingled with the old branches until it was very tough and tangled and strong. Plunged in the middle of this sturdy old friend, was Bobby.

"Why don't ye come out?" demanded Norah, relieved to find that he was not hurt. "I left the teakettle boiling over to come and see if ye were killed."

"I can't get out," said Bobby, struggling. "Lend us a hand, can't you, Twaddles?"

Bobby had fallen with enough force to wedge himself tightly into the heart of the bush, and indeed it was no easy matter to dislodge him. Norah took one hand and Meg the other, and they tugged and pulled till Norah was afraid they might pull him out in pieces.

"Where's Sam?" panted Meg. "He could bend down some of the branches."

"Sam," said Norah, "has gone to meet your father with the car."

"Here comes Mother!" shouted Twaddles, as a familiar figure came up the path. "Oh, Mother, Bobby's stuck!"

Mother Blossom was used to "most anything." She said so often. The four little Blossoms had heard her. So now, though Aunt Polly gasped to see the front door wide open and the hall light streaming out over the snow, three children

dancing about in the cold with no wraps on and a fourth nearly buried in a tall bush, Mother Blossom merely put down the two or three bundles she carried, leaned her weight against the bush and directed Norah how to bend down other branches. Then, holding on to his mother's arm, Bobby crawled out.

"Run in, every one of you, before you take cold," commanded Mother Blossom quickly. "What have you been doing? Dot looks as though she had been through a mill."

Sweeping them before her, Mother Blossom soon had them marshaled into the house. Aunt Polly closed the door and Norah flew to her neglected kitchen. It was dark outside by this time, and the steadily falling snow had spread a thick carpet on the ground.

"Did you bring us something?" asked Dot expectantly, her hair-ribbon over one eye and both pockets torn from her apron.

"Did you bring us something?" inquired Twaddles, shaking Mother Blossom's packages to try to find out what was in them.

"Did you bring us something?" said Meg and

Bobby together, each holding out a hand for overshoes.

Mother Blossom gave hers to Bobby, and Aunt Polly handed hers to Meg, to be put away in the hall closet under the stairs. Just as Meg closed the door of the closet the doorbell rang.

"There's the boy now," announced Mother Blossom. "He's bringing you the something nice I promised."

The boy from Gobert's, the hardware store uptown, probably had never received a more enthusiastic welcome in his life than that he experienced at the Blossom house. Four children flung open the door for him and fell upon him crying: "Where is it? Who's it for? Let me see it!"

He was a tall, thin boy, with a wide, cheerful grin, and four children pouncing upon him at once could not shake his self-possession.

"Got two sleds," he said impressively. "Mrs. Blossom said to send 'em right up. Where do you want them?"

"Put them down there on the rug," directed

Mother Blossom, smiling. "Don't you want to come in and get warm, Ted?"

"No thanks," replied Ted, putting on his cap again. "Want to hustle right home to supper. Looks like a big storm."

He stamped down the steps into the snow, and Meg closed the hall door.

"Two sleds!" Twaddles was round-eyed with admiration. "Now I won't have to wait all afternoon for my turn."

"Unwrap them," said Mother Blossom. "They're just alike, one for the girls, and one for you and Bobby. Aunt Polly bought one as her gift."

Aunt Polly had gone upstairs to take off her hat, but the shouts of excitement brought her back quickly.

"Flexible flyers!" cried Bobby. "Oh, Mother, can't we go out to-night?"

"Mercy, no," answered Mother Blossom. "To-morrow's Saturday, and you'll have plenty of time to play in the snow. Hurry now, and get ready for supper. I shouldn't want Daddy to

come home and find his family looking like wild Indians."

It was too much to expect that the children could think or talk anything but sleds and snow that evening, and many were the anxious peeps taken through the living-room windows after supper to see how deep the feathery stuff was.

"Still snowing," reported Sam, as he brought in a great armful of wood for the fireplace. "Looks like real winter at last."

Mother Blossom was mending the twins' mittens, for their thumbs had a way of coming through, no matter how often she knitted them new pairs or darned the old.

"I'm going upstairs to hunt my muffler," said Meg. "I think I left it in the bureau drawer, but I'd better look."

Father Blossom laughed.

"You all evidently plan to start out right after breakfast, don't you?" he teased them. "Where is the best coasting, Bobby?"

"On Wayne Place hill," replied Bobby. "My, I'm anxious to let Fred Baldwin see the new sled."

Aunt Polly folded up her embroidery.

"I'll go upstairs with you, Meg," she said. "I've something I want to show you. Come into my room after you find your scarf."

As they went upstairs they met Twaddles coming down, carrying the cat, Annabel Lee, in his arms.

"Going to give her a ride on the sled—just in the hall," he informed them. "If she gets used to sleds in the house, maybe she'll like to take a ride outdoors. Philip could pull her."

Aunt Polly was doubtful about Annabel Lee's feelings toward sleds, but Twaddles was sure she would learn to like coasting.

CHAPTER III

AUNT DOROTHY'S LOCKET

"AUNT POLLY?" Meg tapped lightly on her aunt's door.

"Yes, dear, come in," called Aunt Polly. "You found your muffler? That's good. Come over here and see this."

Aunt Polly was seated before her open trunk, a little white box on her knees. Meg came and stood beside her.

"This was your great-great Aunt Dorothy's," said Aunt Polly, opening the little box.

It was lined with blue velvet and on the velvet lay a little gold locket.

"Oh, how pretty!" exclaimed Meg.

The locket was round and set with tiny blue stones that formed three forget-me-not flowers. In the center of each flower sparkled a tiny diamond.

"The blue stones are turquoises," explained Aunt Polly. "Great Aunt Dorothy wore her

locket on a bit of black velvet, but I bought this chain for you. Do you like it, dear?"

"Is it for me?" asked the surprised Meg. "For me, Auntie? Can I wear it to school and show it to the girls? Oh! can I?"

"It is for you," Aunt Polly assured her small niece, kissing her. "But, honey, you must be careful of it. Wear it to school one day, if you want to, and then keep it for special times. You see, you must save it for your little girl."

"My little girl?" echoed Meg, wonderingly. "Why?"

"Because," explained Aunt Polly seriously, "this locket has always been handed down to the oldest daughter. Great-great Aunt Dorothy gave it to her daughter, and she gave it to her oldest daughter and so on. Some might say I should give it to Dot, because she is named for great Aunt Dorothy, but you are the oldest daughter. I had it instead of your mother for that reason. And as I have no daughter, it goes to you."

Meg ran downstairs to show her gift, and the

sleds were forgotten while the children crowded around to examine the pretty locket.

"You must be very careful of it, Daughter," said Father Blossom. "You know you've lost two or three trinkets. This is the kind of thing you can't replace if you lose it."

"I'll be careful," promised Meg, clasping the fine gold chain around her neck again and dancing off to the kitchen to show her treasure to Norah.

The next morning it had stopped snowing, but there was, as Sam remarked, "enough and to spare" of snow for coasting. The minute breakfast was over the four little Blossoms, warmly bundled up, were out with their sleds.

Wayne Place hill was a famous coasting hill, and all kinds of children with all kinds of sleds were on hand to enjoy the first real sledding of the winter.

"Trade with you, Bobby," called a freckle-faced boy, dragging an old tin tray.

Bobby grinned.

"Won't trade," he called back. "But you can go down with me."

So the freckle-faced boy, whose name was Palmer Davis, took turns coasting downhill on his tray, which he managed very skilfully, and going down with Bobby on the brand-new sled.

Bobby taught Meg how to steer, and he usually pulled Twaddles up the hill, while Meg gave Dot an extra ride. They coasted the whole morning and went back for the afternoon.

"I'd never get tired," declared Twaddles, as they were starting home. "I could go sledding all my life!"

"I never get tired, either," announced Dot, from the sled where she was comfortably tucked on and being pulled along by patient Meg.

"That's 'cause you're too young to work," said Meg bluntly, giving the rope such a sudden pull that Dot nearly went over backward.

"She isn't too young," cried Twaddles, who always disliked any allusion to age; he and Dot wanted to be thought just as old as Bobby and Meg. "Hi, Meg, listen! I'm telling you——"

Twaddles twisted around to catch Meg's attention and fell over into a snow drift that lined the edge of the walk. When he had been fished

out and brushed off, he had forgotten what he had meant to tell.

Sunday it snowed more, and a high wind whirled the flakes about till the older folk shook their heads and began to talk about a blizzard. However, by Monday morning the wind had died down and the snow had stopped, though the sun refused to shine.

"Sam says it's awful cold," said Norah, bringing in the hot cakes for breakfast. "He's got the walks cleaned off, but maybe the children shouldn't go to school."

"Nonsense!" said Mother Blossom briskly. "Meg and Bobby both have rubber boots and warm mittens and coats. A little cold won't hurt them."

"And sledding after school, Mother?" urged Twaddles. "Dot and I have rubber boots, too."

"And in summer we can't go coasting," said the practical Dot.

"That's so, you can't," laughed Father Blossom, kissing her as he hurried out to the waiting car to go to his office. "Waiting for warm

weather for coasting is a pretty poor way to spend one's time."

Meg wore her locket to school, and long before the noon hour every girl had heard about great-great Aunt Dorothy, had tried on the locket, and had wished she had one exactly like it.

"Wouldn't it be awful if you lost it!" said Hester Scott. "Then your little girl never could have a locket."

"But I'm not going to lose it," insisted Meg. "Mother says I have to take it off as soon as I come home from school. Then I'll wear it Sundays and birthdays and when we have company."

Many of the children had brought their lunch, and Meg and Bobby had theirs with them. Mother Blossom thought they should be saved the walk home at noon when the deep snow made walking difficult. The afternoon period rather dragged, though Miss Mason, the teacher, read them stories about the frozen North and their geography lesson was all about the home of the polar bear.

"My, I was tired of listening," confided Bobby, hurrying home with Meg at half-past three.

"What do we care what polar bears do when we've got snow all ready to use ourselves?"

"Feels like more, doesn't it?" said the scarlet-cheeked Meg, trotting along in her rubber boots, her blue eyes shining with anticipated fun. "Can't I steer good now, Bobby?"

" 'Deed you can," returned Bobby. "You steer better than most girls. There the twins are out with the sleds."

Dot and Twaddles, rubber-booted and snugly tied into mufflers and coats, greeted the arrival of the other two with a shout.

"Sam says it will snow more to-night," reported Twaddles gleefully. "Maybe it will be as high as the house, Bobby."

"And maybe it won't," said Bobby practically. "Where's Mother?"

Meg and Bobby went into the house to leave their lunch boxes and tell Mother Blossom they were at home.

"Be sure and take off the locket, Meg," called her mother, as Meg went up to her room to get a clean handkerchief.

"Meg!" shouted Bobby, "where's my bearskin cap?"

This cap was an old one Father Blossom had worn on hunting trips when a young man. It was several sizes too large for Bobby, and made him look like a British Grenadier, but he thought it was the finest cap in the world. He liked to wear it when playing in the snow because it was warm.

"It's in the blue box on your closet shelf," answered Meg. She was an orderly little sister, and the boys counted on her help to remind them where they had left their things.

"Meg!" This time the call came from Norah, who was putting away clean sheets in the linen closet. "Down on the kitchen table I left four drop cakes—one apiece for ye. Your mother said 'twas all right."

"Meg! Bobby! Hurry up!" shrieked the twins.

Bobby crammed his cap on his head and dashed down the front stairs. Meg seized her clean handkerchief, ran to the kitchen and got the cakes and went out by way of the back door.

"Thought you were never coming," grumbled Twaddles. "Cake, Meg?"

"One for you. One for Dot," said Meg dividing, and giving Bobby his. "Now aren't you sorry you were cross?"

"He wasn't," Dot assured her; the twins had a way of standing up for each other. "He was just afraid the others would use up all the snow 'fore we got there."

Really, there didn't seem to be much danger of that. Wayne Place hill was alive with coasters when the four little Blossoms reached it. The snow was still deep and soft on the sides, and packed hard and smooth in the center of the road.

"Here comes a bob!" cried Bobby, as the children began their walk up. "Look how she goes! Dave Saunders is steering."

The big sled shot past them, filled with high-school boys and girls.

"Ours is just as nice," said sunny-tempered Meg, catching Twaddles in a wistful stare.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN THE BOBSLED UPSET

"OUR sleds are ever so much nicer," declared Bobby sturdily. "Bobs are no fun, Twaddles. You can't see a thing 'less you're steering. Come on now; we're going down."

Bobby took his place on the sled, Twaddles grasped the belt of his coat tightly, and Meg pushed. Away they went!

"Hurry up, Dot," cried Meg excitedly. "Let's get down before they start to walk up."

"Can you steer it?" asked Dot cautiously.

"What a question!" Meg was indignant. "Didn't I steer it all day Saturday, silly?"

But Dot, for some reason, did not want to coast. To tell the truth, Meg had narrowly missed a tree Saturday afternoon, and after that Dot had shut her eyes tight every time they went down the hill.

"You go too fast," she complained now.

Meg looked at her little sister, genuinely surprised.

"Why, you have to go fast," she said. "You can't stop the sled after you get to going. And if you did all the others would run into you. Come on, Dot, you'll like it after the first ride."

By this time Bobby and Twaddles, rosy and panting, had reached the top of the hill.

"The snow's packed fine," said Bobby enthusiastically. "What are you waiting for, Meg? Feet cold?"

"No, they're warm enough," answered Meg, absently stamping her feet in the snow to prove it. "Dot's afraid."

"I am not!" cried Dot indignantly. "I just said Meg went too fast."

"And she wanted to know if I could steer," said Meg scornfully. "There's nothing to steering, is there, Bobby?"

"Well, of course, you have to be careful," answered Bobby. "Suppose I take Dot down? Want to go with me?"

Dot nodded.

"All right," said Bobby. "Meg, you'll give Twaddles a coast or two, won't you? If he

kicks you in the back just shove your elbow into him."

Twaddles looked abashed. He had a habit, when excited, of kicking with his sharp little right foot, and Bobby strongly objected to being punched in the back when he was centering all his mind on the steering bars of his sled.

Dot settled herself comfortably behind Bobby and glanced back at Meg uncertainly.

"You don't mind, do you, Meg?" she asked timidly.

"Mind?" echoed Meg. "Oh, no, of course not. Silly Dot!"

Meg, Father Blossom had once said, saved a good many minutes that other people wasted in grumbling or envying or being cross. Meg seldom had mean little feelings.

"One, two, three—go!" shouted Dave Saunders suddenly.

A whole fleet of little sleds with shrieking youngsters on them shot down the hill.

"Gee!" cried Twaddles, forgetting and using his right foot vigorously. "Gee, isn't this fun!"

"There, did I steer to suit you?" asked Bobby

of Dot, as he ran gently into a sloping snow bank and the sled stopped.

"It was lovely," sighed Dot. "Do it again, Bobby."

"All right," agreed Bobby. "You stay on, Dot, and we'll give you a ride back. But Twaddles, you walk."

"I should think he'd better," declared Meg severely. "Kicking me in the back like that!"

Twaddles was sure that he would remember the next time, and Meg forgave him.

At the top of the hill they lined up again, and Bobby found Tim Roon and Charlie Black on one side of him.

"Packs good, doesn't it?" said Tim affably.

During the fall and winter Tim and Charlie had occasioned a good deal of trouble for Bobby in one way or another, and he was not at all desirous of having much to do with them. In school, especially, they had landed him in a sad scrape, and Meg, too, had had to endure their teasing. Still, coasting was another matter.

"Have you been here long?" asked Bobby, as Dot tucked in her skirts and Twaddles planted

himself behind Meg. "Why didn't you come to school?"

"Didn't want to," grinned Tim. "Charlie and I coasted all the morning, 'cept once when we saw old Hornbeck's buggy and horse coming. Had the whole hill to ourselves."

Dave Saunders shouted, and Meg and Bobby started. Down, down, they flew, Meg's small hands steering capably, Twaddles' right foot prodding her as enthusiastically as ever. Dot clung a little tighter to Bobby and gasped with cold air and delight.

They were almost at the end of the coast when a loud roar of laughter made them look back. A few rods behind, Tim and Charlie had upset, Tim falling head over heels into the snow at the side of the road and Charlie tumbling almost directly into the path of a coming sled. The boy steering, however, managed to swing out and avoid the limp and flattened Charles.

"Some spill," commented Bobby, using the slang he was learning in the school yard and putting out his foot as a brake, bringing his own

sled to a standstill. "I'll bet that torn piece of runner caught on something."

They stood for a moment watching Charlie crawl out of the road and Tim scrambling out of the snow. Then they walked slowly up the hill for a last grand coast.

"'Cause it's getting dark," said Meg, "and Mother said we must come in at five o'clock. Let's ask Dave what time it is."

"Twenty minutes to five," said Dave, when they asked him. "Want to go down on the bob?"

"Oh, Bobby, can we?" Meg clapped her hands with delight. "I've never been on one. Come on, let's."

"What'll we do with our sleds?" asked Bobby doubtfully.

"Let Hester and me coast down on 'em, and then we'll keep 'em at the big tree till you come," suggested Palmer Davis.

Palmer had been using his tin tray cheerfully all the afternoon, but he did wish for a sled like Bobby's. If Bobby consented to his plan, he would have at least one good ride.

"All right, take 'em," said Bobby, giving his sled to Palmer.

Meg handed hers over to Hester Scott, who likewise had none of her own and had to watch her friends coasting, or hang on wherever there was room. She and Palmer immediately started down the hill on the borrowed sleds.

"Now pile on, kids," ordered Dave cheerfully. "Here, Dot, you and Meg will just fit in here between Rose and Louise. Bobby, get in here by Harold Cross. And, for goodness' sake, keep a tight grip on Twaddles. If he falls off we can't stop to pick him up. All set?"

This was to be the last trip of the bobsled before supper, and Dave packed on his passengers with extra care, desirous that they should each one have a final perfect trip. He was to steer, and took his place after the others were on. He sat before Rose Bacon, a pretty girl with dark eyes and a scarlet cap, and her cousin Louise Lathrop. Back of Louise sat Meg and Dot. Bobby and Twaddles were almost at the end of the load.

"Yah! yah! bet you upset!" taunted Tim Roon,

who had watched enviously as Dave arranged his passengers.

"You keep still!" shouted the boys on the big sled. "All ready, Dave!"

With a sudden rush, the bobsled started. Dot clutched Meg frantically, and even Twaddles was startled. They had no idea it would seem so "different." The wind almost took their breath away, but they still had enough to scream with. You've noticed, haven't you, how every one on a bobsled just naturally screams when it is flying down a steep hill? It is partly the fun and partly the excitement, we suspect.

Laughing and shouting, they whizzed on, till, just as Dave was ready to shout to Fred Graves, the last boy, to put out his foot and Meg had a confused glimpse of the big tree they were passing where Palmer and Hester waited for them, something happened. The bobsled upset!

No one was hurt, though for a moment it was quite impossible to sort out the arms and legs and wildly waving feet and decide to whom they belonged. The boys were up first, and soon had the girls on their feet, some of them speechless

from laughter. The four little Blossoms came up smiling, and though Dot had a scratch on her finger from a nail in some one's shoe, it was trifling and did not bother her.

"All right? Everybody accounted for?" asked Dave, like the good general he was. "All right then. Now I say we'd better streak it for home. I've got some good stiff Latin to study to-night."

"What's the matter, Meg?" asked Bobby suddenly.

Meg's eyes were frightened, and she was feeling around the neck of her dress. She had unbottoned her coat and opened her gray muffler.

"My gold locket!" she gasped. "I've lost it!" She began to cry.

"Lost something?" asked one of the older girls kindly. "What was it? Don't cry, Meg, we'll help you find it."

"It was her Aunt Dorothy locket," explained Dot, for Meg was already on her knees brushing the snow away. "Mother said she should take it off, and now it's gone."

CHAPTER V

MEG IN TROUBLE

"I DID mean to take it off," protested Meg, frantically digging in the snow about the bobsled. "I went upstairs to put it in the box, and then Norah called me about the cakes. Oh, dear, what will Mother say?"

The news soon spread among the others that little Meg Blossom had lost her gold locket, and all the boys and girls turned to with a will to help her search for it. They looked up the road a way, because some thought the locket might have flown off before the sled upset; they hunted over every inch of the ground where they had been spilled out, for Dave was sure it must be there. But though they looked in possible and impossible places, no sign of the dainty gold locket with the turquoise forget-me-nots and the diamond dewdrops in their centers could the children find.

"Half-past five," announced Dave presently. "Awfully sorry, Meg, but your locket must be

lost in the snow. It's too dark and too late to hunt any more now. You run along home and don't worry; maybe you'll get another one next Christmas."

"He doesn't know that this was great Aunt Dorothy's," said Meg sadly.

A very solemn little procession turned in at the Blossom front gate, for Dot and Twaddles were depressed, too. Bobby was towing both sleds and looked as sober as a judge.

"How late you are!" Aunt Polly, reading by the fireplace in the living-room, called to them as she heard the front door open. "Your mother began to worry about you. Is the coasting good?"

"Yes, I guess so," answered Bobby vaguely.

Twaddles sat down on the floor to pull off his rubber boots.

"Meg lost her locket!" he announced, seeing no reason why bad news should be concealed, especially when he was not to blame for it.

Mother Blossom came downstairs just in time to hear this.

"Meg lost her locket!" she repeated. "Not

great Aunt Dorothy's? Oh, Meg, and I told you not to wear it out coasting!"

Poor Meg's tears came faster.

"I did mean to take it off," she sobbed. "An' then Norah called me and the twins were in a hurry, and Bobby wanted his cap, and I forgot about the locket. My darling little gold locket!"

Aunt Polly had come out into the hall, and now Father Blossom opened the front door to find Mother Blossom sitting on the last stair-step, Meg crying in her lap, and the rest of the family standing about with serious faces.

"Hello, anything happened?" he asked anxiously. "Is Meg sick?"

"She lost her locket," answered Dot.

"Well, well, that's too bad," said Father Blossom sympathetically. "Don't cry like that, Daughter. No locket is worth all those tears."

"Mother," confided Twaddles impartially, "is scolding her."

"Twaddles Blossom, march upstairs and get ready for supper," said Mother Blossom, half sternly, half smilingly. "I'm not scolding Meg. I want her to realize, though, that forgetting is

a poor excuse, and that no matter how sorry we are after something has happened it is too late to do the right thing then."

"I'm so hungry," declared Dot, who couldn't bear to see Meg in trouble. "Couldn't we eat pretty soon?"

Mother Blossom went upstairs with Meg and helped her bathe her eyes, and at supper every one was careful not to mention the lost locket. Meg wasn't scolded any more, but every time she saw the empty blue velvet box in her bureau-drawer she was reminded of her carelessness. Aunt Polly said nothing at all, but Meg wondered if she was sorry she had given it to such a heedless girl. Meg thought a good deal about the many "oldest daughters" who had kept the locket safely for her.

"We'll go and look for it after school," Bobby promised the next day; and though they did, they found no trace of it.

That night it snowed again, and Sam and Philip—Philip always assisted at cleaning the walks—had their work to do over again.

"Sleigh bells!" exclaimed Bobby, as the chil-

dren were in the hall putting on their things for the walk to school. "Some one's calling."

He ran to look out of the dining-room window.

"Mother, it's the feed-store man," he shouted. "He's got a sleigh. Can we go?"

Mother Blossom stepped to the door. The "feed-store man" was Mr. Wright, and the four little Blossoms knew him very well.

"Morning!" They heard him greet Mother Blossom. "Nice winter weather we're having. Anybody going to school this morning? I'm driving around that way."

Meg and Bobby danced out on the front porch.

"Take us?" they cried excitedly. "We're all ready."

"Sure, I'll take you," was the hearty response. "Send Dot and Twaddles along, too. I'm going to the station and back, and I'll drop you at the school house and take them on with me. I'll have them back inside an hour, Mrs. Blossom."

Mother Blossom said Dot and Twaddles could go, and in another minute they were climbing

into the sleigh, which was a low box wagon on runners, drawn by two lively bay horses.

The twins sat down cozily in the straw that covered the floor on the sleigh, but Bobby rode up on the seat with Mr. Wright, and Meg did, too. She usually did everything Bobby did.

"Had any snowball fights yet?" asked Mr. Wright, his breath coming out of his mouth like white smoke.

"No. We've been coasting," replied Bobby, "but we haven't had a snowball fight. Miss Wright won't let you throw snowballs near the school. She's afraid you'll break a window."

Miss Wright, the vice-principal of the Oak Hill primary school, was the feed-store man's cousin.

"That so?" he asked interestedly. "Well, now, I'll have to speak to Cousin Lelia. When I was a boy and went to school we had regular snowball fights. Built forts, you know, and chose a captain for each side and had real exciting times. You tell her you won't throw toward the school, and I shouldn't be a bit surprised if she let you

build forts in the school yard and have a good battle."

"The snow's fine there," said Meg, catching Mr. Wright's enthusiasm. "It hasn't been touched since the first storm, only where the janitor dug out the walks. I'd love to have a snowball fight."

"Girls don't snowball fight, do they?" Bobby was quite scandalized, and appealed to Mr. Wright.

"Well, now, I don't believe they did when we were boys," admitted the feed-store man slowly. "But times have changed, you know. I should say that the side that lets girls have a place stands the best chance of winning this snowball fight you're planning."

"Can we stay?" begged Twaddles and Dot, who had overheard.

"I should say not!" declared Bobby crushingly. Meg might win her point, but he hoped he could still handle the twins. "You go straight home. And you can tell Mother, if we don't come in early, that we're having a snowball fight at school."

"You always have all the fun," grumbled Dot. "Why can't we stay a little while?"

"They'll have to say lessons right up to recess time, before they can even roll a snowball," Mr. Wright comforted the twins, driving the sleigh up to the curb before the school-house yard. "You and I are going to have a nice little ride while they're pegging away at their books. How's that?"

Dot and Twaddles were cheered by this thought, and they were able to see Meg and Bobby and the lunch-boxes go up the school walk without another protest.

"You go and ask her now," suggested Meg, as she and Bobby went into the hall. "Go on, Bobby. Ask her if we can have a fight right after school."

Bobby stood a little in awe of Miss Wright, the vice-principal, but the vision of snow forts, and perhaps himself as one of the captains, decided him.

"All right, I will," he said recklessly. "You wait for me, Meg. It's only quarter of."

Bobby hurried down the hall to the door

marked "Office" and opened it. Miss Wright was nowhere in sight. There was no one in the office, and the clock ticked very loudly indeed.

"I'll wait a little," thought Bobby. "She has to come back to ring the assembly bells."

He studied the complicated system of bells that sounded the signals in each classroom for a minute, and suddenly the telephone rang shrilly. It startled him, and he jumped. He looked about uneasily. The bell kept ringing.

"I s'pose I'd better answer it," he said aloud, doubtfully.

"Hello!" he called, taking down the receiver.

"Hello," answered a strange voice. "Take this message, please. Miss Wright has a severe cold and will not be in to-day. Have Miss Garrett take charge of the assembly. That's all, thank you. Good-by."

Bobby blinked. Whoever had telephoned had spoken so quickly that he had had no chance to say a word.

CHAPTER VI

THE ORANGE AND THE BLACK

BOBBY put the receiver back, and at that moment the door opened and Mr. Carter walked into the office.

Mr. Carter was the principal of the primary and grammar schools, but usually spent most of his time at the grammar school. Bobby had been afraid of him once, but that was before he had learned to know him.

"Good morning, Bobby," said Mr. Carter pleasantly. "Has Miss Wright come in yet?"

"No, Mr. Carter. Some one telephoned," answered Bobby slowly, anxious to get the message delivered correctly. "She said Miss Wright had a solemn cold and wouldn't be in this morning."

"What kind of cold did you say?" asked Mr. Carter curiously. "Solemn? What kind of complaint is that?"

Bobby looked perplexed. He thought for a moment.

"Oh!" He had remembered. "It wasn't a solemn cold; it was a severe cold."

"That sounds more like it," said the principal smiling. "Was that all, Bobby?"

"She wants Miss Garrett to take charge of the assembly and she said that's all thank you good-by," repeated Bobby glibly, just as the speaker had rattled it off to him over the telephone.

"All right," agreed Mr. Carter. "I might as well stay the day out here. Let's see, it's about time for the assembly bell, isn't it?"

Bobby had almost forgotten what he had come to the office for. As Mr. Carter moved toward the bells, he recollected.

"I was going to ask Miss Wright," he hurried to say. "Could we—do you think we could, have a snowball fight out in the yard after school? With forts and everything? We wouldn't break any windows."

"I don't see any reason why you shouldn't have a snowball fight," said Mr. Carter promptly. "Remember about the windows and don't aim at any of the girls, and you should have no trouble."

"I guess the girls will be in it," said Bobby sadly. "My sister Meg wants to play, and I s'pose half the girls in school will want to come in."

Mr. Carter laughed, but offered no advice or sympathy, as he pressed the signal for the assembly. Girls, Bobby thought, joining the patient Meg in the hall, always managed to have their way; a fellow might as well give up to them from the first.

After assembly came lessons, and, finally, recess.

"Go out into the fresh air," ordered Miss Mason, who taught the room Meg and Bobby were in. "It isn't cold out—not too cold. No, Frances, you can't stay in and draw."

Miss Mason believed in fresh air, and she usually drove her class out into the yard, no matter what the weather, telling them that exercise would keep them warm. Those who tried to stay in the warm schoolroom were invariably disappointed, for Miss Mason opened every window as wide as it would go and let in the fresh cold air.

"Come on, Frances," called Meg from the doorway. "We're going to play something new."

Frances Smith followed Meg reluctantly, but when she heard about the snowball fight, she was immediately interested.

"Mr. Carter said we could," announced Bobby to the boys. "We must remember and aim away from the windows and not hit the girls. Let's begin to build the forts now."

"We'll have to have a general," said Tim Roon quickly. "I'll be general of the Americans."

"Huh," retorted Bobby. "What do you think the other side is going to be? My men are Americans, too."

"Who said you were a general?" jeered Tim.

"Well, he is," replied Palmer Davis heatedly. "Isn't he, fellows? I guess Bobby proposed this. Come on, who wants to be on Bobby's side?"

"I do," cried Meg instantly.

"So do I," said Frances Smith.

"Girls!" Tim Roon's tone was one of deepest disgust. "For goodness' sake, who ever heard of girls being in a snowball fight?"

"Well, we're going to be in this one," Meg assured him with spirit.

"You can't," said Tim.

"Can, too," insisted Meg. "We don't want to fight on your side, anyway."

The bell rang before they had this settled, and when Mr. Carter stopped Bobby in the hall to ask him how the plans were going, Bobby had to confess that they had done little beyond dispute over the names for the sides and whether the girls should be allowed to play.

"It's the girls' school, after all, as much as it is yours," said Mr. Carter thoughtfully. "Some of them, I imagine, will prefer to look on from the windows; but, if I were you, I would be glad to have those who want to play on your side."

"But Tim can't be American," insisted Bobby. "We won't be any other country."

"Then choose colors," suggested Mr. Carter. "Why not Black and Orange?"

Mr. Carter, you see, was a Princeton man, and he thought those colors very beautiful, as indeed they are.

Bobby overtook Tim Roon on the stairs and asked him about the colors.

"I'll be general of the Orange side," decided Tim promptly.

Tim never thought to ask any one his opinion. He always took what he wanted for himself and did not bother to consult the wishes of others.

"Then I'll be the Black," said Bobby. "We'll have to do a lot of work this noon to get ready. I'm glad we brought our lunch."

Tim's head was so full of snowball fights that he missed outright in spelling, and Bobby was discovered drawing a plan of a fort when he should have been studying his geography lesson.

"There," said Miss Mason when the noon bell rang, "now do try to get this wonderful fight out of your minds by the time the one o'clock bell sounds. And don't let me hear of any one going without his lunch to play in the snow. Eat first, and then play."

Bobby looked a little guilty. He had planned to hurry out and start the building of his fort and eat his lunch as he worked. He sat down

with Meg and bolted the good sandwiches Norah had packed, very much as Philip sometimes ate his dinner. But then this was an exceptional occasion. Bobby didn't usually forget his manners.

"Come on, fellows!" called Tim, as the children streamed out into the yard. "Choose your sides—hurry up!"

As they chose their sides, Tim found, to his disgust, that he would have to have some girls under him. These were mostly sisters of the boys who lived in Tim's neighborhood, and though he had often pulled their braids and otherwise teased them, still they felt that for the honor of their home streets they were bound to fight on Tim's side.

After every one was enrolled on the Black's side or on that of the Orange, they set to work to build the forts. Such scrambling for snow! Such frantic scouring of corners for drifts from which to pack the walls! And mercy, such screaming and shouting! No game was ever played without a noisy chorus, and this was the

most exciting game the Oak Hill children had found in a long time.

"Well, how is it going?" asked Miss Mason, as they came up, damp and rosy, in answer to the noon bell. "I watched you from the window for a few moments, but I couldn't tell what you were building."

Couldn't tell what they were building! If that wasn't like a woman! For a second Bobby was completely discouraged, and then he thought that of course Miss Mason couldn't be expected to know. She probably had no idea what a really good snow fight was.

"We were making forts," he explained. "Tim's is down by the gate and mine is under the chestnut tree. We've got a lot of ammunition made, too."

School was out at three o'clock, and a good many of the teachers came upstairs to Miss Mason's room to watch the fight from her windows. Only first and second grade pupils were supposed to take part, but the third and fourth grade children seemed naturally to drift in the direction of the piled up snowballs.

"We'll help you make 'em," they offered.

"That's fair enough," said Mr. Carter, who was to be referee. "You fourth graders help the first, and the third grade can be a reserve force for the second."

When enough snowballs were ready to begin with, the general of the Blacks retired behind the white walls of his fort and the forces of the Orange did the same. Mr. Carter blew shrilly on his whistle, and the battle raged.

Whenever a head popped up over the wall of either fort, whiz! a snowball would be flung toward it. Sometimes the head ducked, sometimes it was caught fairly.

"Gee, don't they sting!" Palmer Davis danced about, holding one hand to his ear. "Just you let me have a whack at 'em!"

The girls were aiming furiously, if blindly. And though Meg closed her eyes tight every time she threw a snowball, Bobby reported that several of her shots had hit a victim. Thanks to the good work of the fourth grade pupils, the supply of ammunition held out well.

Suddenly Bobby, who was standing on a little

snow mound that raised him slightly above the wall, received a snowball squarely in the eye. He cried out with the pain, though he tried to smother the sound with his hand over his mouth.

"That was dipped in water and packed!" said Palmer angrily, picking up the ball and examining it. "That's no fair. Mr. Carter said packed snowballs weren't to be used. Let's see your eye, Bobby. Is it swelling?"

"Don't say anything," begged Bobby, letting Palmer inspect his eye, which was rapidly swelling. "Mr. Carter would stop the fight if he heard about the ball."

CHAPTER VII

A BIRTHDAY PARTY

PALMER knew this to be true, for Mr. Carter had expressly said that at the first sign of unfair play the battle would be called off. He made few rules for his pupils, but those he did make were never to be lightly broken.

"I'll bet that Tim Roon threw it!" stormed Meg. "You wait!"

Meg was very quick to think and to act, and the sight of her favorite brother, one blue eye almost closed, roused her to strong measures.

"Come on, and rush 'em!" she cried, her little arms waving like windmills. "Don't stand here, throwing balls. Let's capture their old fort!"

For an instant they stared at her, and then, the idea appealing, the whole Black army poured over the side of the fort, and charged on the enemy, shrieking wildly. Bobby, who could barely see where he was going, was swept along with the rest.

Upstairs in the schoolhouse, the teachers looked at each other in surprise, and Mr. Carter was equally astonished.

"Surrender!" shouted Meg, the first to leap the wall of the Orange fort.

The Orange army simply backed. It was very funny to see them. They had not expected an open attack, and they were too taken by surprise to guard their piles of ammunition. As the opposing forces climbed their wall they dumbly gave way and moved back, back, till, with a cry of joy, the Black fighters swooped upon the orderly mounds of snowballs. With their ammunition gone, of course the Oranges could do nothing less than give in.

Mr. Carter came up laughing.

"Well, Tim, that was a surprise attack for fair, wasn't it?" he asked pleasantly. "I think we'll have to say the Black side won. Congratulations, Bobby. And now, Generals, shake hands, and the biggest fight in Oak Hill school history will be over."

Tim put out his lip stubbornly.

"I didn't know it was fair to play like that,"

he argued sourly. "We could have taken their fort easy, if you'd said that was the way to play. 'Sides Meg Blossom put 'em to it. Bobby hadn't a thing to do with that."

"Yes, Meg did," said Bobby hurriedly, trying to edge out of the crowd. "She really won the war."

"Just one moment," Mr. Carter spoke coolly, and yet there was an odd little snap in his voice that made every boy and girl turn toward him. "Look at me, please, Bobby. What happened to your eye?"

"Oh, gee," mumbled Bobby unhappily. He had hoped to get away unnoticed. "I guess—I guess a snowball hit it."

"A packed ball, probably dipped in water first," announced Mr. Carter, gently touching the poor sore eye. "Tim, do you know anything about such a ball?"

"No, I don't," said Tim hastily. "Nobody can say our side packed balls."

"No one can prove your side threw a packed ball," corrected the principal pointedly. "Still, it is hardly likely that Bobby's men would have

hit their own general with a frozen ball. I don't intend to try to find out any more, Tim. But I'm sorry that in every game there must always be some one who doesn't play fair."

Mr. Carter said that Bobby should go home at once and let his mother put something on his eye. It was a real victory for the Black's side, he announced firmly. And Bobby, going home with Meg, his handkerchief tied over his puffy eye, felt like a real general, wounded, tired, but successful and happy.

Mother Blossom always knew what to do for the little hurts, and she bandaged Bobby's eye and listened to the account of the snow fight with great interest.

"Meg, Meg!" Dot's voice sounded from the front hall, as Mother Blossom finished tying a soft handkerchief around Bobby's head to hold the eye-pad in place. "Is Meg home yet?"

Dot appeared in the doorway of Mother Blossom's room.

"What's the matter with Bobby?" she asked.

Bobby explained, but Dot was too excited to

pay much attention to the story of the fight. She had other matters on her mind.

"Meg, you've got a letter," she announced. "We all have. Only Twaddles and I opened ours."

"A letter!" repeated Meg, delighted. "Who wrote it?"

"Give Bobby his," directed Mother Blossom. "Open them, dears. That is the only sure way to know what is inside."

Meg and Bobby tore open the square pink envelopes together, but Meg read hers first.

"Marion Green's going to give a birthday party!" she exclaimed. "Isn't that fun! I can wear my white dress. What'll we take her, Mother?"

Mother Blossom said that they would think up something nice before the day for the party came, and then they heard Father Blossom come in, and down the four little Blossoms rushed to tell him about the snow battle and the party.

"I'm glad," announced Dot with a great deal of satisfaction at the supper table that night,

"there's something in this town they don't say Twaddles and I are too young to go to!"

Everybody laughed, and Father Blossom said that Dot shouldn't worry about her age, for she was growing older every year.

Marion Green's party was the next Saturday afternoon, and Mother Blossom and Aunt Polly helped the children to get dressed.

"If I only had my locket," sighed Meg. "It would look so pretty with this white dress. Oh, dear! I wish I had remembered about taking it off."

Bobby and Meg had hunted often after school for the locket, but though they were sure they had been over every inch of ground where Meg had coasted, they could not find the pretty ornament.

"Don't sigh for things gone," said Aunt Polly, giving Meg a kiss. "We all know you will be more careful another time, dear. Now I'm sure you look very nice. And, as your grandmother used to say, 'behave as well as you look.' "

Meg wore a white dress with blue sash and

hair-ribbons, and Dot was all in pink—dress, ribbons and socks.

"I hope," remarked Twaddles, as they started for Marion's house, "that the ice-cream will be chocolate."

"I don't think you should think about what you're going to get to eat," reproved Meg primly, feeling very much the older sister because she was wearing gloves, kid ones. "It's colder, isn't it?"

It really was very cold, and the four little Blossoms were glad when they reached Marion's house.

"The party's going on," observed Dot, as they went up the steps. She was seized with a sudden fit of shyness, and pressed close to Meg.

Meg and Bobby were experienced in the matter of parties, and they knew you went upstairs to take off your things and then came down to present your birthday present.

"See my new locket and chain," said Ruth Ellis, a little girl Meg knew, who was fluffing out her hair-ribbon before the glass in Marion's

mother's room where the girls were told to leave their wraps. "My uncle gave it to me."

Poor Meg remembered her lost locket again. She thought it much prettier than Ruth's, and she would have been so glad to have it around her neck to show the other girls.

The four little Blossoms met in the hall and went down together. They had brought Marion a knitting set, two ivory needles with sterling silver tops, which folded into a neat leather case, and Marion, who was a famous little knitter, was delighted.

All the presents were put on the center table after they were opened and admired, and then the children played games till Mrs. Green announced that there was something in the dining-room to interest them.

"Gee, it is chocolate," whispered Twaddles shrilly, as the plates of ice-cream followed the sandwiches.

The cake was white with eight pink candles, and if anything looks prettier or tastes better than chocolate ice-cream and white cake, do tell me what it is.

"Now we can fish," remarked Marion, as they left the table.

Back of the wide deep sofa in the parlor, Marion's mother had fixed a "fish pond," and now she gave each guest a rod and line with a hook at the end, and told them all to try their luck.

Twaddles fished first. His hook mysteriously caught something right away, and he drew up a tissue paper parcel that proved to contain a little glass jar of candy sticks. Twaddles liked them very much.

Meg caught a pretty silk handkerchief, and Dot found a soap bubble set on the end of her line. Bobby's catch was a box of water-color paints.

After every child had fished and caught something, it was five o'clock and the party was over. They said good-by to Marion and her mother, and told them they had had the nicest time, which was certainly true.

"My, but isn't it cold!" exclaimed Mrs. Green, as she held open the door for a group of the party guests to go out. "We'll have skating next week if this weather keeps up."

The four little Blossoms hurried home, for the cold nipped their noses and the tips of Meg's fingers in her spandy new kid gloves.

"I like a party," said Dot suddenly, running to keep up with Bobby, "where you get presents, too."

Father Blossom opened the door for them, and they were glad to see the fire blazing cheerily in the living-room.

"Well, well, how did the party go?" asked Father, pulling off Meg's gloves for her, and drawing her into his lap. "Presents, too? Why, Twaddles, I thought this was Marion's birthday."

Twaddles unscrewed the top of his candy jar and offered Father Blossom a green-colored stick.

"We took Marion a present," he explained serenely. "But I guess her mother thought it wasn't fair for her to get 'em all. Everybody fished for something, Daddy."

CHAPTER VIII

DOWN ON THE POND

"A PENNY for your thoughts, Daughter," said Father Blossom presently.

Meg's lip quivered.

"I want my locket!" she sobbed, hiding her face against her father's shoulder. "All the girls have lockets and mine was nicer than any of them."

"Yes, it was," agreed Dot judicially, from her seat on the rug before the fire. "It had such a cunning snap."

"I don't care about the snap," retorted Meg, sitting up and drying her eyes on Father's nice big white handkerchief. "The forget-me-nots were so lovely and besides it was great Aunt Dorothy's."

Father Blossom now proposed a plan.

"I'll advertise for your locket, Meg," he said. "We'll offer a reward, and perhaps some one will find it. At any rate, it will encourage them to look for it. Right after supper we'll get pen-

cil and paper and write out an advertisement for the *Oak Hill Herald*."

Father Blossom did not really believe that offering a reward for the lost locket would bring it back. He thought likely that it was buried under the deep snow beyond the sight of every one. But he knew that Meg would feel better if she thought that everything possible was being done to recover the pretty trinket.

After supper that night they wrote an advertisement, describing the locket, telling where it was lost, and offering ten dollars reward to the person who should bring it back. This advertisement was printed for three weeks in the Oak Hill paper, but though a number of people who read it did go out and scuffle about a bit in the snow on Wayne Place hill, partly in the hope of earning the reward, partly with a good-natured wish to help Meg, no one found the locket. The Blossom family were forced to conclude that it was gone forever.

The Monday afternoon following the party Meg and Bobby came rushing home from school with great news.

"Mother! Mother!" they shouted, flinging down lunch boxes and books in the hall and tearing upstairs like small cyclones. "Oh, Mother!"

Mother Blossom, sewing in Aunt Polly's room, looked up at them and laughed.

"Is there a fire?" she asked calmly.

Bobby was almost out of breath, but he still had a bit left to tell the news.

"They've swept off Blake's pond!" he gasped. "Everybody's going skating. The ice is great, Mother. Just like glass."

"Where are our skates? Can we go?" chimed in Meg. "It isn't a bit cold, Mother."

"Just cold enough to skate, I suppose," smiled Mother Blossom. "Well, of course you can't miss the first skating of the season. But I don't believe they want such little folks on the pond, dear. Some of the big boys will be likely to skate right over you."

"We'll keep near the edge," promised Bobby. "Come on, Meg. Where are our skates?"

Meg and Bobby had double runner skates, which are very good to learn on, and they had

used them only once or twice because the winter before there had been practically no skating. Mother Blossom said the skates were in a dark green flannel bag, hanging in the hall closet, and the children tumbled downstairs to find them. You would have thought that they were afraid the ice would melt, if they didn't hurry.

Presently Mother Blossom and Aunt Polly heard sounds of argument.

"You can't go," cried Bobby. "You're too little."

"You haven't any skates," said Meg crossly.

"Mind your own business," shouted Twaddles, apparently making a rush at some one, for there was the sound of a scuffle and then a wail from Dot.

Mother Blossom dropped her sewing and went out into the hall.

"Children!" she cried warningly, leaning over the railing.

"Oh, Mother!" Bobby's voice was filled with protest. "The twins want to go skating!"

"Can't we, Mother?" said Dot eagerly, looking up at her mother imploringly. "Bobby and

Meg always have all the fun. Can't we go?"

"They're too little," insisted Meg. "They haven't any skates, either. And Dot will get her feet cold and want to come home right away."

"Won't either," scolded Dot. "I am too going! Can't I, Mother?"

"Well, suppose you go till four o'clock," proposed Mother Blossom, who could always see both sides of a question. "If Bobby and Meg do not get cold, they may stay till half-past four. And you'll have to promise to do as Bobby says, twinnies, and keep out of the path of older boys and girls. You mustn't spoil good fun for other people who really know how to skate."

"I suppose you might as well tag along," conceded Bobby rather ungraciously. "Nobody let us go skating when we were only four years old, did they, Meg?"

"No, they didn't," agreed Meg.

"Next year we're going to have skates," announced Twaddles importantly. "Daddy said so."

Before they reached the pond, however, all

ill feelings were forgotten, and the sight of the glassy oval, well-filled with skaters, completely restored the four little Blossoms to their usual good humor.

"Whee!" cried Dot, skipping with excitement. "Look how smooth! Let's make a slide, Twaddles."

Meg and Bobby sat comfortably down in a snowbank to put on their skates, and as they were working with the straps, Dave Saunders glided up.

"You kids want to keep out of the center of the pond," he advised them, not unkindly. "All the high school folks are out to-day, and when a string of them join hands the line goes almost across the pond. If you once slip, you're likely to be stepped on."

Meg and Bobby promised to stay near the outside edges of the pond, and Dave skated off with long, even steps that carried him away from them swiftly.

"It looks so easy," sighed Meg, standing up on her skates and wobbling a little. "I wish I could skate the way Dave can."

"Well, we have to practice," said Bobby sensibly. "Daddy says if you keep at it, by and by you find you're a good skater. Come on, Meg, let's take hold of hands."

Twaddles and Dot stood watching their brother and sister skate for a few minutes, and wished that they, too, had skates. Then they wisely decided to have as much fun as they could without.

"Smooth the snow down on this bank," suggested Twaddles, "and we can play it's a toboggan slide. I wish we had brought the sled."

Dot helped him to smooth down the snow, and then they joined hands and tried the first slide. It was rather rough in spots, but a good slide for all of that, with a thrilling break at the end where they fell from the bank down on to the ice.

"Let me slide, too?" asked Ruth Ellis, coming up to them after the twins had been enjoying their slide for a few minutes.

Of course they were glad to have company, and in a short time a number of the younger children who had no skates were enjoying the

slide. Some of the girls were afraid of the tumble at the end, but Dot, who had always done everything Twaddles did, thought that was the best part of the fun.

Meg and Bobby skated back to them now and then to see that they were all right, and Bobby took off his skates once to try the slide while Twaddles tried to use the skates. They were too large for him, and a fall on the ice dulled his interest. He decided he would rather slide.

"They're going to have a big bonfire to-night," reported Bobby, on one of his trips back to the twins. "Things to eat—oh, everything! I wish Mother would let us stay up to skate."

"She won't, though," said Twaddles absently.

He was busy with a sled Marion Green had loaned him. Marion had tired of playing with her sled, and Twaddles had exhausted all the thrill of sliding down his slide on his feet. He wanted to play toboggan-riding, and when Marion offered him her sled he accepted gratefully.

"You'd better not try that," said Bobby seriously, watching Twaddles carefully drag the sled into the position he wanted. "Look out,

Twaddles—you're foolish. How are you going to stop it when you get down on the ice?"

Twaddles, seated on the sled, looked down the glistening slide to the clear ice below the bank.

"With my foot, of course," he said carelessly. "It's just as easy. You watch."

Bobby watched, and so did Még. So did a dozen of the children who had been playing on the slide. They saw Twaddles start himself with a little forward push, skim down the slide like a bird, take the jump at the end of the bank, and shoot out into the pond among the skaters.

"I knew he'd make a mess of it," groaned Bobby.

Twaddles apparently had forgotten all about using his foot. His sled swept across the ice, crashed into a skater, and Twaddles was sent flying in the opposite direction. The sled brought up against a tree on the other side of the pond, but Twaddles continued to skim over the pond directly toward a patch of thin ice.

His cry, as he broke through, was heard by every one on the pond.

"He'll be drowned!" wailed Meg. "Oh, Bobby, hurry!"

"He can't drown in that water. It isn't deep," said a man, skating past them and stopping to reassure Meg. "Come on, youngster, you and I can get him out."

Bobby put his hand into that of the stranger and was pulled along rapidly toward the spot where the howling Twaddles stood in icy water up to his knees.

CHAPTER IX

A NEW KIND OF JAM

AS the man said, there was no danger that Twaddles would be drowned. Cold and wet and miserable, he certainly was, but the stranger rescued him easily, stretching out a long, thin arm across the ice and lifting the boy bodily out of the water, over the thin ice, and on to thick, firm foothold.

"There, there, you're just as good as ever," he assured the shivering Twaddles. "You want to run home as fast as you can go and get into dry shoes and stockings, and then you won't ever know you fell into the pond. Scoot, now!"

But Twaddles delayed.

"Is it—is it—four o'clock?" he asked, his teeth chattering. "Mother said we could stay out till four o'clock."

"It's five minutes after four," announced the stranger, consulting his watch. "You'll have to run every step of the way to make up for lost time. Run!"

Dot, of course, would run with Twaddles, and Meg and Bobby promised to return the sled to Marion. They had to walk all the way around the pond to get it for her.

"I fell in," said Twaddles beamingly, when he and Dot reached home.

Mother and Aunt Polly rubbed him dry and had him in dry stockings and sandals in a hurry, and then Aunt Polly and Dot decided to walk uptown and match some wool for the sweater Auntie was finishing. Twaddles wanted to go, but Mother Blossom decided he had done enough for that day and had better stay at home with her.

"What are you doing, Mother?" asked Twaddles, watching her curiously, after his sister and aunt had gone down the walk. "Could I do that?"

"Now, Twaddles, you've seen me fill my fountain pen hundreds of times," answered Mother Blossom patiently. "You always ask me that, and you know I can't have you spilling ink all over my desk. Run away and find something

pleasant to do till I finish this letter, and then we'll toast marshmallows over the fire."

Twaddles set out to amuse himself. He wished he had Philip to play with, but the dog was out in the garage and Twaddles had been forbidden to make the journey through the snow in his sandals. To be sure there was Annabel Lee, but the cat was in a sleepy mood and refused to wake up sufficiently to be amusing.

"Oh, dear," sighed Twaddles. "There's nothing to do. I wonder where Norah is?"

He scuttled down to the kitchen, which was in beautiful order, but no Norah was in sight. She was up in her room changing her dress, but Twaddles did not know that.

"I'm hungry!" he decided, opening the pantry door. "Skating always gives you such an appetite."

He had heard some one say this.

As in most pantries, the favorite place for the Blossom cake box was on the highest shelf. Why this was so, puzzled Twaddles, as it has puzzled many other small boys and girls.

"I should think Norah might leave it down

low," he grumbled, dragging a chair into the pantry with some difficulty and proceeding to climb into it.

By stretching, he managed to get his fingers on the cake box lid and pull it down. He opened it.

The box was perfectly empty.

"Why, the idea!" sputtered the outraged Twaddles, who felt distinctly cheated. "I wonder if Mother knows we haven't any cake. I'd better go and tell her."

But he didn't—not right away. For there were other boxes on the various shelves, and Twaddles felt it was his duty to peep into these to see what he could find. He was disappointed in most of them because they held such uninteresting things as rice and barley and coffee, nothing that a starving person could eat with any pleasure.

Then at last he thought he had found something he could eat. It was in a smooth, round glass jar with a screw lid and was a clear jelly-like substance that looked as though it might be marmalade or honey or some kind of jam.

He opened the jar without trouble and sniffed at the contents. It smelled very good indeed. Twaddles plunged in an investigating finger.

The jam stuck to his finger. Still, Twaddles could not get enough off to taste, and he had liberally covered all the other fingers on that hand before he pulled away from the jar.

"That certainly is funny jam," he puzzled, trying to scrape his fingers clean with the other hand.

"Twaddles!" called Mother Blossom. "Oh, Twaddles, where are you? Aren't you going to help me toast marshmallows?"

Twaddles backed out of the pantry, into Norah who had come downstairs, freshly gowned, to start her supper.

"Glory be!" she ejaculated. "Twaddles, what have you been up to now? If you've been messing in my pantry, I'll tell your mother. What's that all over your hands?"

"Jam," said Twaddles meekly.

Norah eyed him with suspicion.

"There's no jam there," she said. "Come over here to the light where I can see ye."

Norah took Twaddles' wrists in her hands gingerly, for he was a very sticky child, and turned his hands over to examine them.

"Jam, is it!" she snorted indignantly. "You just go and show yourself to your mother. See what she says about the jam. I declare, you can't keep a thing from the young ones in this house!"

Twaddles was glad to escape from the kitchen before Norah should discover the many things out of place in her pantry, and he went into the living-room, carefully holding out his gummy hands before him, to find his mother.

"Now, Mother," he began hesitatingly, "I was real hungry, so I thought I'd eat a little piece of cake. I knew you wouldn't mind."

"I didn't know we had any cake in the house," said Mother Blossom, in surprise.

"We haven't," explained Twaddles hastily. "So then I thought bread and jam would be nice. But I never saw such funny jam; I can't get it off."

Then, as Norah had exclaimed, Mother Blos-

som cried: "What in the world have you been into, Twaddles?"

She looked at his sticky fingers and then burst out laughing.

"My dear child," she said seriously, "I'm afraid you've found Daddy's pot of glue!"

And that is just what Twaddles had been into, and a fine time he and Mother had getting the sticky stuff off his fingers. It took them so long, using hot water and sand soap, that Mother Blossom declared they could not toast marshmallows that afternoon, and then Twaddles was sorry he had not waited.

"Such a lot of fuss about a little glue," he complained to himself, for Father Blossom scolded when he came home and found half of his glue wasted and he said that Twaddles should have no dessert for his supper; and Norah was very cross because she had to give her pantry an extra scrubbing, Twaddles having managed to track the floor with glue. "I have bad luck all the time," sighed poor Twaddles, blaming every one but the one small boy who was responsible for the bad luck.

"Daddy," said Bobby that evening, "I'd like to earn some money."

"Yes, Son?" answered Father Blossom encouragingly. "What do you want money for?"

"I heard Miss Mason saying to Miss Wright to-day at noon that Mrs. Jordan and her son are having an awful hard winter," explained Bobby. "Folks want to send Paul to a home, but Mrs. Jordan won't let 'em. She wants to go out doing day's work. But she's too old. Miss Mason says old people are so heady."

Father Blossom smiled.

"I think almost any mother, old or young, would fight to keep her son from being placed in a home," he said gently. "Do you want to earn money for the Jordans, Bobby?"

"Yes, sir," replied Bobby sturdily. "If you'd lend me the snow shovel, Daddy, Palmer Davis and I figured out we could earn a lot shoveling walks."

"Oh, no, Daddy," interposed Mother Blossom from the piano where she was helping Meg with her music lesson and yet listening to the conver-

sation between Bobby and his father. "He's too little for that heavy work, isn't he?"

"I can, too," argued Bobby heatedly. "Can't I have the shovel, Daddy? Mother's always afraid I'm going to hurt myself. I'm not a girl."

"Well, Mother happens to be right," said Father Blossom firmly. "You and Palmer are altogether too little to try shoveling snow from walks; it's packed now and is work for a grown boy or man. If you had a shovel of your own, I shouldn't consent to any such scheme for earning money."

"There are other ways, Bobby," Mother Blossom assured him brightly. "I'm sure the other children will want to help when they hear about the Jordans. Why don't you, and some of the boys and girls in your class, give a little fair? We'll all help, won't we, Daddy?"

"But I don't know how to give a fair," objected Bobby.

CHAPTER X

WORKING FOR THE FAIR

"I DO," said Meg, turning around on the piano bench. "You have tables, and on 'em things to sell, and everybody comes. Where could we have the fair, Mother?"

"I think here in the house," answered Mother Blossom thoughtfully. "We live near enough to the center of town for people to get here easily."

"But how do you have a fair?" persisted Bobby. "Where do we get things to sell? Can we do it all ourselves?"

"Certainly you can," declared Father Blossom. "You want the money to be your own gift, so you boys and girls must do the work. We older folk will help with advice. Mother can tell you all about it. Her church society gives two fairs every year."

Mother Blossom smiled as Bobby looked at her expectantly.

"You want to know how we do it?" she asked.

"Well, first we choose our committees and plan the tables. There is usually a refreshment table; a table for fancy work, aprons, bags, and pretty handkerchiefs; if the fair is held in summer, we have a flower table; then a grab-bag table for the little people. After we plan how many tables we will have, the committees set out to collect the things to be sold. They go to the baker and ask for cake donations; and to ladies and ask them to bake cakes; they ask other ladies to make aprons and bags; Mr. Barber, the grocer, usually gives us something for the canned goods table. You see, the idea is to ask people to give all these things and then whatever they are sold for can go outright to the purpose for which the fair is held."

"Like new carpets for the church," put in Meg wisely.

"Yes, new carpets for the church, or new books for the Sunday-school library," agreed Mother Blossom. "Your fair will be for the Jordans, and the money you raise will help them through the winter."

Bobby was silent a long time, puzzling over

the idea of a fair. Before his bed hour came he had decided that perhaps that was the best way to raise money, and anyway he would talk it over with the boys at school.

"I've been thinking," announced Mother Blossom at the breakfast table the next morning. "As our living-room isn't very large, I think three tables will be all we can comfortably arrange. As an extra attraction for the fair, why don't you give a little play?"

"A stuffed animal play," suggested Aunt Polly mysteriously. "If the children like the idea, don't you say another word. I'll make the costumes and drill them."

A stuffed animal play and a fair sounded delightfully exciting, and when Bobby mentioned his plans to a group of close friends at recess he found them most responsive.

"There's nothing much to do 'round now," said Palmer Davis. "I'm dead tired coasting every day. I'd like to help Mrs. Jordan."

Mrs. Jordan was an old woman who lived in a tumbled-down house. She had a crippled son, and had supported herself, since the death of

her husband, by going out to work by the day. As she had always worked faithfully and never complained, Oak Hill people really did not know that this winter she had had a hard time to get enough to eat and coal enough to burn. Her son was unable to earn anything, and Miss Mason, for whom Mrs. Jordan washed, had thought that it would be a kindness to put him in a home where he would be well taken care of at no expense to his mother.

"I'll not hear of it!" declared Mrs. Jordan angrily, when the teacher mentioned this plan to her. "He's going to live at home with me as long as I have a roof to cover us."

Miss Mason, who, like many kind-hearted people, did not like her well meant offers to be refused, had told Mrs. Jordan plainly that she was ungrateful, and that she need not bother to come for the wash any more. So the poor old woman, who counted on this dollar and a half weekly, was deprived of that money. In Oak Hill so many housewives did their own work that there was not a great deal of extra work to be had.

Two or three of the boys backed out when Bobby explained that they must ask people for the things to be sold at their fair. But enough promised to go with him after school that afternoon to make it worth while to go on with the planning.

"Aunt Polly and Mother and Norah have promised to fix the 'freshment table," explained Bobby. "We're going to sell ice-cream and lemonade and cake. And Meg and Dot and the girls are going to get the things for the fancy work table. So we only have to get enough for one table."

"What kind of table?" asked Bertrand Ashe practically.

"All kinds I guess," returned Bobby. "Let's go to all the stores. And, oh, yes, we're going to rehearse the stuffed animal play to-night. Aunt Polly says as many as can, come over to our house."

After school that afternoon Bobby and his committee started out to get the things to sell at their fair. Now, no one likes to ask for things, perhaps, but Father Blossom had explained that

it was very different when one is asking for something for some one else and not for one's own gain or pleasure.

"When you go into a store, remember that you are doing something for poor Paul Jordan and think how you would feel if you were poor and lame," he had said to Bobby. "When you ask Mr. Barber for something from his shelves you're not asking for Bobby Blossom, but for Paul. That will make asking easy for you."

The first store the boys went into was the hardware store. Mr. Gobert, the proprietor, came forward when he saw the six boys.

"Want your skates sharpened?" he asked cheerfully.

The committee looked hopefully at Bobby. He had promised to "ask first."

"We're going to have a fair," gulped Bobby, his cheeks red, but his blue eyes looking at Mr. Gobert squarely. "It's for Paul Jordan and his mother. And we thought maybe you'd give us something we could sell."

"For that lame Jordan and his mother?" re-

peated Mr. Gobert. "Do you mean to tell me they need help? Is Mrs. Jordan sick?"

"She has rheumatism in her hands," said Bobby earnestly. "And she's so old and slow lots of folks don't have her wash any more. She's chopped down all the fence to build a fire with. And she doesn't want to put Paul in a home."

"Well, well," Mr. Gobert stared at Bobby thoughtfully. "So you're going to help her out by giving a fair, are you? Where's it going to be? Can I come?"

"At our house. Three weeks from Saturday," answered Bobby, wishing his committee would back him up with a few words and not stand by with their mouths and eyes so wide open. "We're going to have a play, too."

"I'm busy Saturday afternoons," said Mr. Gobert regretfully, "but I'll send Mrs. Gobert up to buy something. Now I wonder what I have you would like? How about a couple of nice penknives?"

Bobby thought knives would be very good indeed, and Mr. Gobert led them over to the case

where all the penknives were displayed and let the boys choose any two they wanted. On his advice they chose a pearl-handled knife for a woman and a stag-handle which would please a boy or a man.

"Stop in at Hampton's," said Mr. Gobert when they thanked him warmly, the knives neatly wrapped and safe in Bobby's reefer pocket. "He ought to have something nice for you."

Mr. Hampton kept the stationery store, and when he heard about the fair he promptly gave the committee two boxes of writing paper, a pad of bright new blotters, and a bottle each of red, white, and blue ink. "To be patriotic," he said.

"They all want to know what it's for, then they're all right," said Bobby, as the boys hurried along to another shop. "Talking takes a lot of time, though."

The boys were really surprised to find how interested people were, and how generous. The grocer gave them six glasses of bright red jelly which, he said, would make their table look pretty as well as sell readily. The baker prom-

ised them a plate of tarts the morning of the fair. Steve Broadwell, the druggist, and a special friend of Bobby's, not only gave them three fascinating little weather-houses, with an old man and woman to pop in and out as it rained or the sun shone, and two jars of library paste, but told Bobby that he would save some bottles of cologne for Meg's table. The jeweler gave them four small compasses. Even kind Doctor Maynard, whom they met driving his car out toward the country, when he learned what they were doing, promised them a dollar as his admission to the fair "whether I get a chance to come or not."

"I'll bet we had better luck than the girls," boasted Palmer, as they started for their homes. "And we have more places to go to next week. What kind of play is it going to be, Bobby? Can we all be in it?"

"Aunt Polly said as many as wanted to could," replied Bobby. "She calls it a stuffed animal play. I don't know what that is, but Aunt Polly is lots of fun."

The boys promised to be over "right after sup-

per," and Bobby ran in to find his family and tell them his afternoon experiences. He had to wait a few moments, because Meg and Dot were busy telling what had happened to them.

"We've got ever so many things," bubbled Meg enthusiastically. "The drygoods store gave us yards of ribbon; and Miss Stebbins said she had six pin-cushions she didn't want." (Miss Stebbins kept a small fancy-work store in the town.) "We saw Miss Florence, and she is going to dress two dolls for us. And we've got belt buckles, and sachets, and bags, and aprons, and, oh, ever so many things."

"Mr. Broadwell says to tell you he is saving some cologne for you," reported Bobby. "Say, isn't getting ready for a fair fun? And the boys are coming over to-night to see about the play, Aunt Polly."

"I'm all ready for you," said Aunt Polly capably.

CHAPTER XI

BOBBY'S MEANEST DAY

FOUR boys and four girls rang the Blossom door-bell that night after supper, eager to take part in the stuffed animal play. With the four little Blossoms, that made twelve children, a most convenient number, Aunt Polly said.

"I'll show you what we're going to do," she promised them, beckoning to Twaddles and Dot to follow her. "Since the twins will have to go to bed in half an hour, we'll let them be the first demonstrators."

Aunt Polly and the twins went out of the room, and in three minutes there pranced back the cunningest little bear you ever saw. He wobbled about on his four legs, opened a red flannel mouth and yawned, shook hands with the delighted boys and girls and behaved altogether as a well-brought-up bear should.

"Let me do it!" shouted the other boys and girls. "Let me! Let me!"

The bear was unbuttoned down his back by smiling Aunt Polly, and the flushed and triumphant twins stepped out.

"Didn't we do it right?" they demanded happily. "Isn't it fun? But you can't be a bear—Aunt Polly said so. There's only one of everything."

Then Aunt Polly, who had cut out and stitched the white muslin case for the bear and painted his nose and lined his red flannel mouth, explained that for every two children there could be an animal. The play would be an animal play. They would act and talk as people would, only the actors would be lions and tigers and other animals.

"Choose what you would like to be to-night, and I will measure you and start work on the cases," she said. "And if you do not tell outsiders what kind of an animal you are going to be, that will double the fun."

So the other children, long after the twins had gone reluctantly up to bed, paired off and argued about their choice of an animal and changed their minds and finally decided. Then

they were measured by Aunt Polly, and it was announced that three rehearsals a week would be held till the Saturday set for the fair. Mother Blossom brought in a plate of cookies and a basket of apples, and after these were eaten it was time to go home.

With all the preparations for the play and fair, school went on as usual. The children sometimes thought that it might be interrupted for a week or two without loss to any one, but the school committee never took kindly to this idea. They were sure that nothing in the wide world could be of more importance than regular attendance at school.

"I know enough now," grumbled Bobby one morning, scowling at his oatmeal.

"We could stay at home and play with the animal bags," said Meg, who never tired of trying on the muslin cases that so quickly transformed them into different animals. "It's really snowing ever so hard, Mother."

"Not half as hard as it often has when you have plowed cheerfully through it," Mother Blossom reminded her. "Come, Bobby, finish

your oatmeal. Norah has your lunches packed."

Dot and Twaddles stared at the two older children in astonishment. They wanted to go to school with all their hearts, and the idea that any one could tire of that magical place, where chalk and blackboards and goldfish and geography globes mingled in riotous profusion, had never entered their busy minds.

"It's an awful long walk," mourned Bobby.

"I'll take you in the car," said Father Blossom quickly. "Hurry now, and get your things on. I think there's been too much staying up till nine o'clock lately, Mother."

"I think so, too," agreed Mother Blossom. "We'll go back to eight o'clock bedtime beginning with to-night. What is it, Dot?"

"Can we go, too?" urged Dot. "Sam will bring us back."

"Oh, for goodness' sake!" frowned Bobby, pulling on his rubber boots and stamping in them to make sure they were well on. "Why do you always want to tag along every place we go?"

Dot looked hurt, and Bobby was really

ashamed of himself. He wasn't cross very often, but nothing seemed to go right this morning. No one said anything, but Mother Blossom sent the twins out into the kitchen on some errand, and then the car came around and Meg and Bobby and Father Blossom tramped through the snow and climbed in under the snug curtains. Bobby would have felt better if some one had scolded him.

"Guess we're going to have enough snow this winter to make up for last," remarked Sam Layton cheerfully. He was not cross, and he was blissfully unconscious that any one else had been. "Fill-Up and me is getting kind of tired of clearing off walks every single morning," he went on, giving the dog his nickname.

Philip, who sat beside Sam on the front seat, wagged his tail conversationally.

"Maybe we'll have another snow fight," suggested Meg. "That would be fun, wouldn't it, Bobby?"

"No, it wouldn't," snapped Bobby ungraciously. For the life of him, he did not seem able to feel pleasant.

Meg talked to Father Blossom and Sam after that, and in a few moments they were set down at the school, and the car rolled on to the foundry office.

Bobby had bad luck—bad luck or something else—all the morning. He blotted his copy book; he had the wrong answer to the example he was sent to work out at the board; at recess he was so cross to Palmer Davis that that devoted friend slapped him and they had a tussle that ended in both being forced to spend the remainder of the play time sitting quietly at two front desks under Miss Mason's eye. Altogether Bobby seemed to be in for a bad day.

"Everybody's so mean," he scolded, going off in a corner by himself to eat his lunch at noon. "I never saw such a lot of horrid folks."

To add to his unhappiness, Norah had forgotten that he didn't like tuna fish sandwiches and had given him all that kind. Bobby knew that very likely she had packed egg or some other good mixture in Meg's box and that by merely asking he could trade with his sister.

But no, it suited him to feel that Norah had deliberately spoiled his lunch for him.

"Robert, you haven't been out of the room this morning," cried Miss Mason, swooping down on him. "Go out and get some fresh air and see if you can't be pleasanter this afternoon. What you need is to play in the snow."

Bobby dashed downstairs and out into the yard, wishing violently that he could punch some one. He even rolled several snowballs in the hope that some of his friends would come along and offer themselves as targets. Then a mischievous idea popped into his mind.

"I'll fill up Miss Mason's desk," he chuckled. "She needs to play in the snow, too."

This very bad boy proceeded to fill his arms with snowballs and stole up the back stairway, where he would be less likely to meet any one, into his classroom. The room was empty, and Bobby arranged his snowballs neatly in Miss Mason's desk, which happened to be an old-fashioned affair with a hinged lid.

"She can play with it," murmured Bobby, closing the lid softly and running downstairs

again so that he might come in with the others when the bell rang.

It had stopped snowing, and the sun was shining warm and bright, dazzling to the eyes. Bobby felt better already, for some mysterious reason, and he plunged into a hilarious game of tag that lasted until the signal rang.

When he went into his classroom he glanced quickly at Miss Mason's desk. It looked as usual, and when the reading lesson was given out, he quickly forgot the hidden snowballs. Palmer Davis was standing up to read a paragraph when the class first heard something.

"Drip! drip! drip!" went a soft little tapping noise.

Miss Mason heard it, too. She thought the pipes in the cloak room had sprung a leak perhaps.

"Teacher!" Tim Roon's hand waved wildly. "Teacher, your desk's leaking!"

Tim, for once, did not have a guilty conscience in connection with a piece of mischief, and he was delighted to have an opportunity to call attention to the fact.

"It's leaking all over!" he volunteered.

"That will do, Tim," said Miss Mason calmly.

She raised her desk lid and peered in. Then she closed it and surveyed her class. Bobby could feel his face getting red. He looked down at his book.

"Robert Blossom," said Miss Mason, "come here to me."

Bobby went up the aisle which seemed at least two miles long. Miss Mason did not ask him if he had put the snow in her desk. She merely raised the lid again and pointed to the half melted snowballs.

"Take those out," she commanded coldly. "Throw them out of the window. Then get a cloth and dry the inside of this desk and mop up the floor. And you may stay an hour after school to-night."

Bobby had to make a separate trip for each mushy snowball, the eyes of the class following him from the desk to the window and back again with maddening interest. When he came back from a trip to the cellar to get a cloth from the janitor, for Miss Mason refused to help him,

and began to dry the inside of the desk, they snickered audibly; but when he got down on his hands and knees and mopped the floor under the desk, they seemed to think it was the biggest kind of joke. They did not dare laugh aloud, but Bobby could feel them smiling and nudging one another.

"Next time, I hope, you will leave the snow outside where it belongs," said Miss Mason, when he had stayed his hour after school that night and she dismissed him.

"Yes'm," murmured Bobby meekly.

"My, it's been the worst day," he confided to Father Blossom that evening. "Nothing went right. I had the meanest time!"

CHAPTER XII

BUILDING A SNOW MAN

THE rehearsals for the play went on merrily, and the children were faithful in attendance. Meg, though, was an hour late getting home from school one afternoon, and as Bobby could not practice without her, he was very much put out.

"Where have you been?" he demanded. "Everybody's been waiting for you. Miss Mason didn't keep you in, did she?"

Meg looked uncomfortable.

"No, I didn't have to stay in," she admitted.

"Then where were you?" insisted Bobby.

"I was hunting for my locket," confessed Meg. "I heard Daddy say the snow melted a lot last night, and I thought maybe I could find it. But I didn't." She sighed deeply.

Meg still clung to the hope of finding her locket, though the rest of the family had long ago given up the idea that it would ever be found.

A day or two later when the children came into the school yard they were surprised to find a small army of snow soldiers drawn up to receive them. There were six men in a row, headed by a captain, wearing a rakish snow hat and carrying a fine wooden sword.

"Who did it?" asked every one. "Did Mr. Carter make 'em?"

Miss Wright was ready to tell them.

"Some poor tramp who was once a sculptor made them for you," she told the wondering pupils. "John, the janitor, tells me that he was here all last night keeping the fires going because he was afraid the pipes would freeze. This poor artist saw the light, and knocked at the door to ask if he might come in and get warm. I'm glad to say John asked him in and shared his midnight lunch with him. Then he took him home to breakfast with him. But first the artist made these snow men to please you, and perhaps to see if his old skill still was left to him."

"Let us make a snow man in our back yard," proposed Bobby to Meg on the way home from

school that afternoon. "Dot and Twaddles tried it, but there wasn't enough snow then. We can make a good one."

They found the twins ready to help them, and in a very short time they had rolled a huge snowball that was pronounced just the thing for Mr. Snowman's body.

"We can't make long thin legs like the soldiers," said Bobby regretfully. "I wonder how the man made 'em like that. We'll have to have short roundish legs for ours."

The short "roundish" legs finished, they had still to make the head. This was done by rolling a smaller snowball and mounting it on the large round one.

"Now he needs a face," said Dot, gazing with admiration on their work. "How'll you make his eyes and nose, Bobby?"

"With coal," said Bobby. "Meg, will you go and get some lumps of coal? And ask Mother if there is an old hat we can have. He ought to have a hat."

Meg ran into the house, and was back again

in a few seconds, carrying a handful of coal done up in a bit of newspaper.

"Mother's hunting up an old derby hat," she reported. "She'll throw it to us. Oh, Bobby, doesn't he look funny?"

The snow man was a bit cross-eyed, but he had a cheerful, companionable look for all of that, and the children were well pleased with him.

"But arms!" cried Meg suddenly. "He hasn't any arms, Bobby."

Sure enough, they had forgotten to make him any arms. This omission was quickly remedied. Mother Blossom called to them, as they were putting the finishing touches on the right hand.

"Here's an old hat of Daddy's," she said, stepping out on the porch. "Will it do? Here, Meg, catch."

She tossed the hat over to Meg.

"Wait and see how it looks, Mother," begged Dot. "Want a chair, Bobby? I'll get it."

The snow man was so tall that Bobby could not reach the top of his head, and when Dot came back, dragging a chair for him to stand

on, even then he had to get up on his tiptoes to place the hat.

"He's a beauty, isn't he?" said Mother Blossom enthusiastically. "We'll keep him there to guard our yard as long as the snow lasts. You haven't built him where he will bother Norah when she wants to hang out clothes, have you?"

The four little Blossoms were sure they had not, and Norah herself, when she came to the door presently to have a peep at the wonderful snow man, declared that he wouldn't be in her way at all.

"'Tis fresh cookies I've been baking," she announced smilingly. "I don't suppose any one will be after wanting to sample 'em? Ye do? Well, then, wipe your feet on the mat and come in. And, for the love of goodness, leave the kitchen door open. I'm near perishing for a breath of cool air."

The kitchen was very warm, for Norah had been ironing. She was a thrifty soul, and when she had a big fire to heat her irons she liked to bake good things to eat in the oven at the same time. A basket full of beautifully ironed and

starched clothes sat on the table, ready to be carried upstairs, and a bowl of crisp sugar cookies sat beside it.

"Leave the door open," ordered Bobby, his eyes on the cookies. "My, they look good, Norah. How many may we have?"

"Two apiece, and no more," said Norah firmly. "'Tis blunting your appetite for supper if ye take more than two. Are they good, Twaddles?"

Twaddles' mouth was too full for an answer, but his eyes spoke for him. Those cookies were simply delicious.

"Bobby!" cried Meg from the window where she had wandered with her cakes. "Oh, Bobby, here's that horrid Tim Roon and Charlie Black. Look! They're going to throw snowballs at our snow man."

There was a rush for the window. Sure enough there stood Tim Roon and Charlie Black, just outside the fence, and as the four little Blossoms watched, Tim flung a snowball smack at the poor defenseless snow man.

"Leave 'em alone," counseled Norah, putting

a restraining hand on Twaddles, who was making for the door. "As long as 'tis only the snow man they're aiming at, let 'em be."

But as Norah spoke, whiz! through the kitchen door came a big snowball. It landed right on top of the basket of wash, and lay wet and dirty on top of a ruffled guimpe of Dot's.

"The dirty ragamuffins!" The angry Norah snatched the slushy ball and flung it into the coal-scuttle. "The miserable spalpeens!"

Bobby seized his cap.

"I'll fix them!" he muttered, as he dashed out of the house.

Tim Roon and Charlie Black saw him coming, and they judged that it would be better to run. They didn't want to fight Bobby, even two to one, so close to his own house. Some one might come out and help him.

The two boys tore up the street, Bobby after them. Unfortunately, Bobby ran head-first into an old gentleman who, before he let him go, collared him and read him a lecture on the rights of people in the street. This gave Tim

and Charlie a chance to hide behind some bushes on a vacant lot.

"Jump on him when he comes along," advised Tim, who was not a fair fighter.

So when Bobby came running by, for he did not know how far up the street the boys had gone, Tim and Charlie pounced on him and rolled him in the snow.

"None of that," said a strange voice. "Two to one's no fair. One of you leave off, or I'll stop the fight."

The strange voice belonged to a high-school boy, Stanley Reeves, and both Tim and Charlie knew he was a member of the gymnasium wrestling team and quite capable of stopping any small-boy fight.

"You're too old to fight a boy of that size, anyway," declared Stanley, surveying Tim with disgust.

"But I'm going to punch him," announced Bobby heatedly.

"Oh, you are?" said Reeves with interest. "Go ahead, then, and I'll sit here and keep an

eye on this chicken to see that he doesn't pitch in at the wrong moment."

Reeves took a firm hold on Charlie's coat collar and backed him off to one side.

"Wash his face for him—it needs it," the high-school lad went on to Bobby.

Like a small but angry bumble bee, Bobby flew at Tim. They clinched and plunged headlong into the snow, where they pounded and wrestled and grunted and gasped as all boys do when they are fighting a thing out. Tim was not a fair fighter, nor a very brave one, and most of his victories had been won over smaller boys or by using unfair methods. Now with Stanley Reeves looking on, he did not dare cheat, and so Bobby unexpectedly found himself, after perhaps five minutes of tussling, sitting on Tim's chest, with Tim breathless and beaten.

"Wash his face," insisted Stanley, suddenly scooping up a handful of snow and beginning to rub it thoroughly into Charlie's eyes and mouth.

CHAPTER XIII

THE TWINS HAVE A SECRET

BOBBY seized a double handful of snow and began to give Tim the same treatment.

"Quit!" yelled Tim in anguish. "Quit, I tell you, Bobby! Ow, now you've cut my nose!"

A small twig in the snow had scratched poor Tim rather violently on his small pug nose, but it was not cut.

"Say you've had enough," ordered Bobby, thumping about on the fallen lad's chest like a particularly well-packed bale of hay. "Say you've had enough!"

"Had enough," murmured Tim obediently.

Bobby got up at once, and Tim rose and shook himself. At the same moment Stanley Reeves let go of Charlie. The two boys slouched off without a word.

"Now that ought to last them for some time," said Stanley cheerfully. "Any time you need any advice on training up Tim Roon in the way he should go, you just apply to me, Bobby."

Bobby grinned, showing his even, white teeth, and said he would. Then Stanley went on to join the other high-school boys who were bob-sledding, and Bobby ran home to tell his family the result of his chase.

That night it snowed again. Father Blossom said winter was a habit, like anything else, and that after the weather made up its mind to send one snow-storm it couldn't stop but had to send them right along.

"I want Dot to stay in the house to-day," said Mother Blossom, after Meg and Bobby had started for school. "She coughed a good deal last night and I think she'll have to keep out of the snow for a while."

"Oh, Mother!" wailed Dot. "I want to go coasting with Twaddles. Everybody's out on Wayne Place hill in the afternoons, and when we go in the morning we have the nicest time! Please, Mother, just this once; and I will take the nasty cough medicine to-night, just as good."

Mother Blossom shook her head.

"Mother said no," she said firmly. "Now, Dot, you're too big a girl to cry. Why, dearest,

you haven't missed a day since there has been sledding. Can't you and Twaddles find something pleasant to do in the house?"

"Just suppose you hadn't any house to stay in," remarked Twaddles severely. "Then you'd have something to cry about."

Twaddles was usually very good indeed just when Dot felt like being naughty. And when Twaddles was bad, Dot was generally as good as gold. But sometimes they were naughty together, and now and then as good as gold at the same time, but not often.

"There's nothing to do," sobbed Dot, using her pretty handkerchief to sop her tears with and finding it not half large enough. "I'm tired of paper dolls and I don't want to play school. Oh, dear, oh, dear!"

Aunt Polly, coming into the room in search of her pet thimble, discovered the disconsolate Dot huddled on the sofa, and Twaddles standing by her suggesting one amusement after the other.

"Never mind, honey," comforted Aunt Polly, sitting down on the sofa and cuddling Dot into

her lap. "I know something you haven't done and that will be heaps of fun."

"That I never did?" asked Dot, sitting up to look at Aunt Polly.

"That you've never done," repeated Aunt Polly.

"Indoors or out?" asked Twaddles, standing on one foot excitedly.

"Out," answered Aunt Polly.

"Mother won't let me go out," wailed Dot, the tears starting again. "I think it's mean."

"Mean?" said Aunt Polly. "Goodness, lambie, suppose you should be sick when we had the play and the fair? No indeed, you mind Mother like a good girl and you'll be glad when the cough is all gone. But this thing I have in mind can nearly all be done in the house, and then we'll get Sam and Twaddles to do the outdoor work. Then, when Bobby and Meg come home this afternoon, maybe they won't be surprised!"

Aunt Polly and Dot and Twaddles put their heads very close together and whispered for five minutes or so. The twins were delighted at the

idea of having a secret from Meg and Bobby who, of course, were often into things that did not interest or held no place for Dot and Twaddles.

"Well then, that's settled," announced Aunt Polly, after they had whispered their plan. "Now we'll go down to the kitchen and see Norah."

Norah was glad to see them, and when she heard what they wanted she brought out a plate of stale bread and a thick chunk of clean white suet.

"Sure ye can cut it up yourselves," she said to Dot and Twaddles, who eyed the big carving knife fearfully. "Get your scissors. I cut the stuffing for the Sunday chicken with the scissors, entirely."

So for half an hour the twins, under Aunt Polly's direction, snipped bread crumbs and suet happily and then busily tied strings to other pieces of fat.

"We're going to have company, Norah," explained Dot, opening and shutting her cramped

little fingers when the bread and fat were all nicely snipped.

"Company, is it?" asked Norah, glad to see Dot had stopped crying. "Is it food for company you're fixing now?"

"Yes, it's their dinner," answered Dot, nodding her head. "Isn't it, Twaddles? And we're going to set the table. You watch, Norah."

Aunt Polly went down into the cellar and came back, carrying a broad, smooth board, the top of a packing box. She emptied the bread and suet crumbs into a paper bag and put the fat tied to the pieces of string in another. Then Twaddles slipped on his cap and coat, took the two bags in one hand, tucked the board under his arm, and ran out to the garage.

"Put a chair here in the window, Dot," said Aunt Polly. "There, I'll pin back the curtains. Now you can see everything they do."

Norah peered curiously over Dot's shoulder, interested, too.

In a few minutes Sam came out of the garage, carrying a hammer and the little short step-ladder that conveniently turned into a chair if

you knew how to do the trick. He and Twaddles marched over to the clothespole that Norah seldom used. She preferred to wind her clothesline around three, and the fourth pole, to Dot's fancy, always seemed to feel slighted.

"Now that poor pole won't be lonesome any more," she murmured to herself.

Sam set up his stepladder, and, taking the board from Twaddles and a couple of long, strong nails from his pocket, he nailed the board firmly to the top of the pole.

"See, Norah?" cried Dot.

Then Sam took the bags, and the fat and crumbs of bread he scattered all over the top of the board. All around the edge of the board he drove in smaller nails, and to these he tied the pieces of fat, there to dangle on their strings.

Dot clapped her hands.

"It's our bird table!" she explained to Norah. "Where's Mother? I'm going to tell her."

Mother Blossom came and admired the bird-table, and the grocery boy, when he came with the packages, noticed it right away.

"Annabel Lee can't get up there, can she?"

he grinned. "Looks like you'd have plenty of company, Dot."

Indeed, the few sparrows that came first must have told the other birds, for in less than an hour there was a throng of feathered creatures eating at the twins' table. Chippies and snowbirds came as well as the sparrows.

"I only wish we had built one before," said Aunt Polly, watching the hungry little crowd eat. "I've thrown out bread crumbs every morning, but half the time they were buried in the snow. We can keep this swept off and always filled with food."

Dot spent the rest of the morning watching the birds, and how she did laugh at those who picked at the fat hanging on the strings. They flew at it so fiercely it seemed as though they thought it was alive and they must kill it.

"What's that out in the yard?" asked Bobby the first thing when he came home from school at noon.

"That's our bird table," Twaddles informed him. "Aunt Polly thought of it and Dot and I

fixed it. Sam nailed it up for us. You ought to see the birds eat the stuff."

"Let me put some food out to-morrow morning?" asked Meg. "Doesn't Aunt Polly think of the loveliest things!"

Dot didn't want to leave the window to eat her own lunch, but the sight of the rice pudding decided her, especially as Mother Blossom said she didn't think her table should be slighted when the birds showed such appreciation of the one set for them.

"They have such good manners," said Mother Blossom pointedly.

"I wonder if Bobby and Meg couldn't go over to Mrs. Anson's right from school, Mrs. Blossom?" asked Norah, a few minutes before it was time for the children to put on their boots again. "We haven't an egg in the house, and Sam is going to be gone with the car all the afternoon."

"But, Norah, I hate to have them go so far in this kind of weather," objected Mother Blossom. "Don't you think it feels like more snow?"

"Oh, no, Mother!" Bobby's voice was eager. "They were sweeping off the pond this noon,

weren't they, Meg? They never sweep it till it's stopped snowing for good, so there'll be skating. Meg and I can skate up the pond to the creek and up that as far as Mrs. Anson's house. Then we'll come home by the road, so we won't break any eggs. My, Mother, that will be such fun!"

Meg's eyes danced with pleasure.

"It won't snow, Mother," she said positively. "It doesn't feel that way a bit, really it doesn't. And we do need eggs."

Mother Blossom laughed.

"Very well, then," she agreed. "But you must carry my muff and Bobby shall have the little hand-warmer stove."

CHAPTER XIV

LOST IN THE STORM

OF course the twins were wild to go, too; but even if Dot had not had a cold, the walk would have been much too long for them. Aunt Polly promised to help them make molasses candy that afternoon, and that cheered them up somewhat.

"Now if it snows between now and the time school is out, come home without going to Mrs. Anson's," said Mother Blossom, following Meg and Bobby to the door. "It gets dark early you know, and you mustn't be out alone in that deserted section in a storm or after dark. Remember, won't you, Bobby?"

"Yes'm," answered Bobby, squinting knowingly at the sky as he had seen Sam do. "It isn't going to snow, Mother. Make Dot and Twaddles save us some candy, will you?"

"Course we will," called the twins, who had followed Mother Blossom. "A whole plateful, Bobby."

"I hope it doesn't snow," said Meg, trotting along beside Bobby, her hands deep in Mother's soft, furry muff. "Got the hand-stove, Bobby?"

"Yes. But it isn't lit," her brother said. "I'm not going to burn it for this little walk. Hurry, or we'll be late."

They reached the school house just as the first bell rang, and all that afternoon first Meg, then Bobby, would glance at the windows, fearful lest they see the whirling white flakes that would mean they could not go after the eggs. But three o'clock came and still no snow.

"I said it wouldn't!" announced Bobby triumphantly, meeting Meg at the door, for he had had to go down to the cellar and borrow a match from the janitor to light the little charcoal stove Mother Blossom had given him to carry in his pocket.

"Feel how warm." Bobby held out the stove for Meg to hold in her hand. "John had to light it for me, 'cause he was afraid I'd set myself on fire. Silly! I guess I've lit matches before!"

As a matter of fact, Bobby had had very little to do with matches unless an older person was

about, but he did not like the janitor to think he never had matches in his pocket.

Bobby had their skates over his arm, and the two children hurried down to the pond. Already a number of skaters were out, and the ice was in perfect condition. Bobby helped Meg buckle on her skates and then in a few minutes he had adjusted his own, and they set off.

"Next year, maybe, we can have real hockey skates," said Meg. "The twins are going to have double runners. But we've had fun on these, haven't we?"

Bobby looked at his sister. She wore a bright red tam-o'-shanter cap on her yellow hair, and her blue eyes sparkled like sapphires. Her cheeks were rosy above the dark fur collar of her coat, and even if she was his sister, Bobby had to admit that she was very pretty.

"Sure we've had fun on these skates," he agreed heartily. "You skate fine now, Meg, honest you do."

Meg was pleased, as what little sister would not be?

"Well I'm glad I learned," she answered. "What's that over there, Bobby?"

She pointed to something fluttering from a bush on the other side of the pond.

"Let's go and look," said Bobby. And then, as they came up to it, he said: "Oh, it's an old skating cap. Guess some one lost it and they've hung it there so he'll see it."

At the head of the pond they came to the creek. This, too, was frozen over solidly, and, joining hands, Meg and Bobby began to follow its winding way.

"'Member how it looks in the summer time?" asked Meg. "These bushes meet across it then."

Great high banks of snow rose on either side of the creek, and when they reached the twin oaks, so called because the two trees had grown together to form one trunk, where they must turn off to reach Mrs. Anson's house, Meg and Bobby had trouble finding a foothold.

They took off their skates and managed to scramble up the bank, however, and then found themselves in a field of snow, unbroken save for

a few little dots and dashes that they recognized as rabbit tracks.

"They don't clean off their walks, do they?" giggled Meg. "How do you tell where Mrs. Anson's house is?"

"See the chicken wire sticking up?" replied Bobby. "And there's smoke coming out of her chimney."

Sure enough, at a distance across the field the children could see rough posts sticking up which they knew were part of the chicken-yard fence. Soft, black smoke was coming out of a chimney, too, and drifting against the sky.

Walking single file, and glad of their rubber boots, the two children tramped over the field and came presently to the shabby, lonesome little house where Mrs. Anson lived.

"My land!" she cried when she saw them. "I was just thinking about your Ma this morning. My man's been away all week cutting wood, or I'd have sent him down with some eggs. I suppose you want two dozen and a half, Bobby?"

While Mrs. Anson bustled about packing the eggs in a neat box, the children warmed their

hands and drank the hot cocoa she had ready for them.

"Made it for my man, but he sent word he won't be back till to-morrow morning," she explained. "There's your eggs, now, and you'd better hurry. We're going to have more snow to-night."

Mrs. Anson spent half her time alone in the lonesome little house, with three big tabby cats for company and her hundreds of chickens to keep her busy. She liked to be alone, and she always seemed contented and happy.

"I don't see why she says it's going to snow," said Bobby to Meg, as they took the eggs and went out of the narrow gate which creaked dismally.

Mrs. Anson had gone directly to her chicken yard, and they could see her feeding her hens and shutting them up for the night, evidently in great haste.

"Well, I guess she knows," returned Meg doubtfully. "I heard Daddy say she and Mr. Anson knew more about the weather than most

folks, 'cause they've lived 'way out here so long and watched it. Let's hurry."

As they hurried on suddenly snow flakes began to fall. Gently at first, then faster and faster, till the children could not see a foot before them. Meg nearly walked into a tree.

"We won't go home the creek way," said Bobby decidedly. "Come on over here, Meg, and we'll get down on to the road. It'll be easier walking, and perhaps some one will give us a ride."

Both Meg and Bobby knew where the road was. They had driven over it with Sam in the car, and they had walked it many a time in the summer. Then why it should perversely disappear just at the time when they needed it most was something neither one was ever able to explain. But disappear it did—that ill-natured country road completely ran away from them.

"We've walked awful far," sighed Meg, breathless from fighting against the wind which blew the snow into their faces so sharply that each flake stung. "Where do you suppose that road is, Bobby?"

Bobby was carefully carrying the eggs. He had no intention of losing those.

"I guess we'll find it," he assured his sister cheerfully. "Are your hands cold, Meg? Here, hold this heater a minute."

Meg's hands in her muff were quite comfortable, and she opened her mouth to say so to Bobby. But without warning she slipped down out of sight before she had time to say a word.

"Meg!" shouted Bobby. "Meg! Are you hurt?"

Meg's delighted little laugh bubbled up to him.

"Oh, Bobby," she gurgled. "I guess I've found the road. Look out for that bank I fell down. I'm sure this is a road. You come and see."

Bobby cautiously scrambled down the bank, over which Meg had slipped, and joined his sister. Meg was on her feet again, and trying to brush the snow off her coat and out of her collar.

"It is a road, isn't it?" she asked anxiously.

"Yes, it's a road; but it can't be the one near

Mrs. Anson's house," answered Bobby, puzzled. "We've walked too far. What's that sticking up?"

It proved to be a signboard, and, giving Meg the eggs to hold, Bobby tried to reach up high enough to brush the snow off so that they could read the lettering. The board was far above his head.

"Shinny up," urged Meg. "Or stand on my shoulders."

The pole was too wet for the first, and Bobby did not want to use his sister for a stepping stone. He finally managed, by jumping up and flirting his cap across the board at each jump, to knock off enough snow to enable them to read the letters.

"M-E-R-T-O-N, six miles," spelled Bobby. "R-I-C-E-V-I-L-L-E, four miles."

Meg looked at him, troubled.

"Where does it say Oak Hill is?" she asked.

"It doesn't say, but we'll find it," said Bobby stoutly. "Come on, Meg, we'll go the way that's four miles."

Meg had gone some distance down the road

before she discovered that she had left her muff at the sign post. There was nothing to do but to go back for it. As they came up to it, nearly buried in the snow already, so fast it was falling, a little rabbit started up and hopped away over the road in a panic of fear.

"Guess he thought it was another rabbit," commented Bobby.

He walked ahead, carrying the eggs, and Meg followed him closely. Suddenly he stopped and gave a shout.

CHAPTER XV

GREAT PREPARATIONS

"MEG!" he called. "What do you think? Here's the old skating cap!"

"Skating cap?" repeated Meg stupidly.

"Yes! The skating cap we noticed when we were going to Mrs. Anson's," said Bobby. "Don't you remember? We must be clear on the other side of the pond. That was the back road we followed."

Meg was too tired, with tramping through the deep snow, to care very much about which road they had followed. She wanted to get home.

"My coat collar's all wet on my neck," she complained fretfully. "How can we get over the pond, Bobby?"

"Have to walk it," said Bobby. "The snow's too thick to try to skate. Give me your hand, and you won't slip."

Meg didn't slip, but half way across Bobby did, his feet going out from under him without

warning and sending him sprawling. It was so dark now, for they had walked a long distance since leaving Mrs. Anson's house, that Meg could hardly see him.

"Bobby! where are you?" she cried.

"Right here, don't step on me," giggled Bobby, scrambling to his feet and making sure the eggs were unharmed. "That dark thing over there must be the bank. Gee, doesn't that sound like Philip?"

A dog on the low bank had barked, and indeed it did sound like Philip.

"Why it is!" called Meg in delight, when they reached the edge of the pond and began to climb up. "You dear, old Philip! Were you looking for us?"

Philip wagged his stumpy tail and frisked about, trying his best to tell the children that he had come out to look for them. Having Philip with them to talk to and pet made the rest of the way home seem shorter, and in less than fifteen minutes Meg and Bobby were shaking the snow off their clothes in the Blossom front hall.

"Your mother has worried ever since the first

snow flake," said Father Blossom, helping Meg shake snow from her wet hair. "Sam and I should have been out with a lantern if you had been much longer."

"We're starving," declared Bobby, handing over the eggs which he had remembered to carry carefully all the time. "Isn't supper ready?"

Supper was ready and Meg and Bobby were so hungry that Father Blossom pretended to be alarmed for fear there wasn't enough food in the house. He said he was afraid Norah would come in and say there was no more bread and that all the butter and baked potatoes were gone, and then what would they do?

"Oh, I think they're only a little hungrier than usual," Aunt Polly said, smiling.

Being lost in a snow storm didn't make either Bobby or Meg dislike the snow and the first thing they thought of the next morning was the weather.

"I hope it snowed all night," said Meg cheerfully. "I would like to see snow up to the second-story windows, wouldn't you, Bobby?"

Bobby thought that would be fun, too, but

when he mentioned it at the breakfast table, no one seemed to like the idea.

"Just about as much snow as I care for, right now," declared Father Blossom. "Our trucks are having trouble breaking the roads and this fresh fall is discouraging for people who want to work. I've a good mind to get out the old box sleigh and hire a horse and let Sam drive to Fernwood for that freight consignment," he said to Mother Blossom.

But Meg's quick little brain understood at once.

"Daddy!" she cried, the loveliest rose color coming into her cheeks. "Darling Daddy, can't we go in the box sleigh?"

Mother Blossom and Aunt Polly laughed, but Bobby looked up from his oatmeal quickly and the twins began at once to ask if they could go, too.

"Why, lambs, what about school?" Mother Blossom reminded them and that helped Meg with her argument beautifully.

"It's a one-session day!" she said triumphantly. "The teachers have to go to a lecture this after-

noon. Oh, Mother, you went riding in a sleigh when you were a little girl and I never did."

"And you've been in automobiles and when I was a little girl I never did," Mother Blossom said gaily. "However, we'll ask Daddy."

Father Blossom looked at Meg, a twinkle in his eye.

"I was careless to mention 'sleigh'," he announced. "But I still think Sam will have to go with a horse, instead of a foundry truck; and if four children were ready and warmly dressed about quarter of one, I shouldn't wonder if that sleigh stopped before this house."

My goodness, there was no more peace at the table after that. The twins nearly went crazy and they wanted to put their leggings on at once, while Bobby and Meg for some mysterious reason seemed to feel that the sooner they got to school, the earlier they would be dismissed and they hurried away a quarter of an hour before the usual time.

"You don't think it will hurt Dot, then?" said Mother Blossom as her husband began to pull on his coat ready to go to the foundry.

"Oh, it's a sunny day and she is about over that cold," he answered. "I think the fresh air will do her good."

Dot and Twaddles, who had heard the question and were listening anxiously for the reply, sped away to the kitchen to tell Norah where they were going.

You might have thought that the twins were setting out for the North Pole, the way they started to get ready. They got out their rubbers and brushed them carefully. They put their sweaters and scarfs and mittens on one chair, their warm coats on another and their hats on the table. Then they went out on the back porch and shook their leggings and put them on still another chair. How Mother Blossom did laugh when she saw everything spread out.

"We don't want to keep Sam waiting," explained Dot seriously. "Bobby and Meg will have their things on, but Twaddles and I have a lot to do."

At that moment Twaddles was out in the barn asking the patient Sam questions.

"Yes, your father told me you could go," said

Sam. "Yes, the dog can go too—the more the merrier, as far as I am concerned. No, you can't drive—I have to keep my mind busy some way and driving is a good plan."

"Why are we going to Fernwood?" asked Twaddles. "Daddy said it was about freight."

"And you don't see why we slight the Oak Hill station—is that it?" Sam returned good-naturedly. "Well, Twaddles, this consignment got side-tracked and it's some new office equipment your father wants right away; it is quicker to drive over and get it, than have it re-routed."

Twaddles said "Oh," and immediately wanted to know how many miles it was to Fernwood.

"Ten or twelve," said Sam. "And mind you dress warmly enough."

"Oh, I have lots to wear," Twaddles assured him. "This is my last year coat, you know."

"But you want to remember the wind blows pretty hard on that back road," said Sam. "If you think you're going to be the least bit chilly, you'd better put plenty of newspapers around you."

"You think you can tease me, but you can't,"

Twaddles told him scornfully. "Paper isn't warm."

"That's just where you make your mistake," declared Sam gravely. "There is nothing warmer than paper—fold two or three newspapers under your sweater and you can face the stiffest wind and be comfortable."

Twaddles looked unconvinced. But when he went back to the house and asked Norah, she, too, said that newspapers kept out the cold.

"Say, Dot," said Twaddles to his twin two minutes later. "Sam and Norah say newspapers will keep you warmer than—than anything. Let's fix some."

Dot thought he was playing a joke on her, but when he finally made her understand, she was willing to wear a newspaper or two and be cozy.

"Oh, we want more than one or two," said Twaddles, who liked a heaping measure of everything. "Come on down cellar and you fix me and I'll fix you."

Norah kept all the old newspapers in the cellar, in a corner, and every three weeks a man came around and bought them.

"I don't know exactly how to do it, but you stand still and I'll tie them on," directed Twaddles.

He had brought a ball of cord with him and now he went to work to wrap the papers around the plump Dot. He opened them out wide and she held them around her by using her arms till he had a quantity of the sheets rolled about her. Then he took his string and wound that around her several times and tied it in a strong knot.

"I don't see how I can get my sweater and coat on over this," objected Dot when she was declared "finished."

"Oh, they'll go on all right," the cheerful Twaddles assured her. "Now do me—put on lots of papers, so I won't be cold."

Dot obediently wrapped papers around him till he was twice his usual chubby size and looked very odd indeed. Then she tied several thicknesses of the cord about him and he too was ready for the long drive.

"We rattle when we walk," said Twaddles, "but I guess that is all right."

They found some pictures that interested them

in the papers remaining on the floor and they stayed in the cellar till, to their surprise, they heard quick feet running overhead and Meg's voice in the kitchen.

"It must be noon!" said Dot. "Come on, we have to hurry."

And as they started upstairs, Norah opened the door and called down:

"Lunch is ready—are you still playing in the cellar?"

Mother Blossom and Aunt Polly were just sitting down at the dining-room table and Meg and Bobby, who had been upstairs to wash their hands, were in the hall, when the twins marched through the kitchen and slipped into their chairs. That is, they tried to sit down, but something seemed to be wrong.

"What on earth—" began Aunt Polly, staring.

"My dears! What have you been doing?" Mother Blossom gasped.

And Norah glanced in from the kitchen murmuring:

"Is it entirely crazy they are at last?" while Meg and Bobby shouted with laughter and

turned Dot and Twaddles round and round to get a good look at them.

"What have you been doing?" Mother Blossom repeated.

"Why, we're ready for the sleigh ride," explained Twaddles. "Paper is awfully warm, Mother. Sam said so."

"It keeps the wind out," Dot added.

"You look like bundles of waste paper," Bobby chuckled. "You'd better not go out on the street that way, or when the trash cart comes, the man will pick you up and throw you on top."

"I do think you have more paper than you need," said Aunt Polly gently.

And though Twaddles and Dot did not want to admit it, they had already begun to feel that way themselves. They could not sit down with any comfort and when Bobby ran out in the hall and brought in Dot's coat, she found she couldn't get it on at all.

"You'll be warm enough without the paper, dears," Mother Blossom said positively. "Plenty warm and much more comfortable. Let Bobby

and Meg help you get unwrapped and then hurry and eat lunch before it is cold."

So Bobby and Meg untied the knots in the string and the papers slipped to the floor. The twins breathed a sigh of relief and became interested in the creamed potatoes.

"But don't forget to take the papers down to the cellar and put them back on the pile, neatly," cautioned Mother Blossom.

Bobby and Meg helped Dot and Twaddles take back the papers and then it was time to put on their coats and sweaters. Twaddles was just stamping his feet into his rubbers—he always shook the house, Norah declared, when he put on his rubbers—when the sound of jingling sleighbells was heard outside.

"There's Sam! There's the sleigh!" shrieked the four little Blossoms, scattering kisses between Mother Blossom and Aunt Polly and rushing for the door.

"Good grief, is the house on fire?" Sam demanded as they came running out of the house. "Where's Philip? I thought you wanted him to go."

CHAPTER XVI

OVER THE CROSS ROAD

PHILIP could be heard barking madly in the garage and Meg volunteered to go and let him out. The others were too much absorbed in the horse and sleigh to offer to release the dog.

"What's the name of the horse?" asked Dot.

"I forgot to inquire," Sam answered. "So you may call him anything you like. He lives at the livery stable and you might name him after his master, Walter Rock. Call him Walt for short, you know."

Philip, dancing and barking, came running over the snowy lawn and Meg raced after him.

"The horse's name is Walt," Dot informed her importantly. "I think he looks kind, don't you, Meg?"

"Of course he is a kind horse," said Meg. "He's a pretty color, too."

Walt was a spotted horse, brown and white,

not a polka-dot horse, of course, but with what Meg called a "pattern" of oddly shaped slashes of white on his brown coat.

"He must be a foulard horse," Meg commented as the children climbed into the soft clean straw which filled the box of the sleigh.

Sam shouted with laughter and Mother Blossom and Aunt Polly and Norah, who were all standing in the doorway to see them start, called out to ask what the joke was about.

"Tell you when we come back," shouted Sam, taking up the reins. "All set back there? Then here we go, jingle bells!"

The horse set off at a trot and the four little Blossoms grinned at each other delightedly. There were plenty of warm blankets in the sleigh and the livery stable man had put in a fur lap robe that made Twaddles think of a big black bear. None of the children had gone driving in a sleigh very often, for Father Blossom used his car practically all winter and kept no horses. Aunt Polly had horses and for all the children knew she might have a sleigh, though they had never seen one in the barn; but

when they visited Aunt Polly at Brookside Farm, it was summer and snow was the one thing furthest from their thoughts.

"Meg," said Sam soberly as they left Oak Hill and turned into a country road, "this kind of a horse is called a calico horse. I thought you'd like to know."

"Well, foulard is something like calico—I mean the pattern is," Meg replied. "I like calico horses."

"I wish I'd brought the sled," said Bobby. "We could tie on behind and ride on it."

"It's more fun this way," Meg insisted, being a little girl who didn't always want something she didn't have. "Do you like to drive a sleigh, Sam?"

"Sure," said Sam over his shoulder. "Always did. When I was a boy and lived in the country, we had a real old-fashioned sleigh, with red cushions in it and everything. We used to drive down the river on the ice then—that was sport, let me tell you."

"Let us drive on the river," said the four little Blossoms with one voice.

"That's nothing but a creek, where you go to skate," Sam answered a little scornfully. "This river I'm talking about was a real river—wide and deep; boats came up it in summer time. We lived two or three hundred miles north of here and it was three times as cold."

"Well, it's cold enough now," said Dot wisely. "Isn't it, Meg?"

"Yes," Meg agreed absently, "but look how pretty it is—I think snow is lovely. And the bells sound so pretty, too. Here comes another sleigh."

The children stood up to look, holding on to the back of the seat, to steady themselves. Coming toward them were two horses, harnessed to a sleigh much like the one Sam was driving—a light box set on two sets of runners.

"From the creamery," said Sam, as his quick eyes saw the heavy milk cans.

The man driving the sleigh called "Howdy!" and shook his whip at them and Dot gasped and held on to Meg as Sam turned out for the other team.

The road was fairly well trampled in the cen-

ter, but when it became necessary for two vehicles to pass, they had to turn into the drifts. The four little Blossoms felt their sleigh tilt alarmingly, but before they had time to be frightened they were back on the level road again.

"Do—do sleighs ever tip over?" asked Dot anxiously.

"Oh, sometimes," Sam said cheerfully. "But if you are going to be turned over in anything, Dot, always pick out a sleigh for the accident; a motor car can pin you down and a railroad wreck is serious, but when a sleigh turns over, you just slip out into the snow and there's nothing to hurt you."

This sounded comforting, but the children agreed that they would rather not be tipped over.

"I think we'll take this cross road over," said Sam, when they came to a place where four roads met. "It may be a bit harder going and more drifts to get through, but we'll save time at that."

"We don't have to save time, do we?" Bobby put in. "We're always saving time, Sam—at

least you are. And I think it would be fun to drive as much as we want to, just once."

Sam laughed good-naturedly as he turned the horse into the road he had chosen.

"You'd like a good time to last as long as possible, wouldn't you, Bobby?" he said. "Well, with all the short cuts and all the time saving I can do, we won't be home before dark; does that suit you?"

That suited Bobby exactly and he began to whistle.

"Say," Twaddles cried, interrupting the whistling suddenly. "Say, Sam, I want to get out."

"You do? Why?" asked Sam, without turning his head.

"I saw a glove back there in the road," Twaddles announced. "A nice glove, Sam, that somebody lost."

Sam said "Whoa!" to the horse and turned to look at Twaddles.

"How far back—a mile?" he asked suspiciously.

"Just a little way," Twaddles replied ear-

nestly. "I want to go get it, Sam. Please. It's a good glove."

"I suppose it is a worn-out mitten, but this is your trip, partly," said Sam, who was kindness itself and usually did all he could to make the four little Blossoms happy. "So run along, but if you're not back in an hour I am going on without you."

Twaddles laughed and Bobby helped him down. They watched him running down the road, a small, sturdy figure, dark against all that whiteness.

"He's got it!" cried Dot, as Twaddles stooped and picked something up. "Twaddles sees everything!"

Her twin did not run all the way back, because he couldn't. It was hard going in the snow and his feet slipped. Besides, he was almost out of breath.

"It's a good glove," the others heard him saying as he came within speaking distance. "It's a very good glove and somebody lost it."

Bobby and Meg pulled him back into the sleigh and he held out the glove for them to see.

Sam Layton whistled in surprise when he examined it.

"Well, Twaddles, you were right and I was wrong," he said. "This *is* a good glove; it's fur lined and almost new. Somebody is out of luck —one glove is about as useless as one shoe lace."

"Maybe we'll find the man," Twaddles declared placidly.

"You believe in luck, don't you?" said Sam, starting the horse on his way again. "That glove must have been dropped from some wagon or car and probably last night. I think we're the first folks through here to-day."

Bobby wanted to know how Sam could tell and when it was pointed out to him that there were no tracks through the snow, he understood at once.

"Wouldn't it be nice if we found the other glove?" Dot suggested suddenly.

She had been very still and thoughtful and this was what she had been thinking.

Sam laughed and said that no one was ever as lucky as that.

"Daddy could wear them," Dot went on. "But maybe they wouldn't be the right size."

Walter, the horse, was walking now and the bells did not jingle. The road was drifted with snow and it was all even a very willing horse could do, to pull a sleigh through them.

It was Bobby's sharp eyes that first spied something square and dark ahead.

"There's a car!" he cried. "And I'll bet it's stuck!"

The horse pricked up his ears and stared steadily, while Sam gave a low whistle.

"Must have been there all night," he said. "There are no tracks through here. I suppose some one gave up the attempt and walked."

When they came up with the car, they found that no one was in it. It was a small closed car and it was stuck in the drifts as Bobby had guessed.

"I'll bet the glove belongs to the man who owns the car," said Meg.

"Your mother doesn't like you to say 'I'll bet,'" Sam reminded her. "But perhaps the

driver did drop the glove. I'll bet he's wondering where he lost it."

The children shouted with laughter and Sam looked bewildered. Bobby explained to him they were laughing because he said "I'll bet."

"Well you see, you set me a bad example," said Sam good-naturedly. "You'd better be more careful."

"Why don't we tow the car along with us?" Bobby suggested.

"One reason, we haven't a rope and another reason, Walt has all he can do to tow us and still another reason is that we don't want to be accused of making off with a stranger's car," said Sam, and stopped for breath.

"Well, anyway, there's a sled—we can take that, can't we?" said Dot placidly.

CHAPTER XVII

MR. MENDAM

"SLED!" chorused all the other Blossoms. "Where is there a sled?"

Dot pointed to a drift at one side of the road. Sure enough, the runners of a sled were sticking straight out.

"Perhaps there is a little boy in there," Twaddles whispered, awe-struck, and Sam hooted with laughter.

"No little boy would stay quietly buried in a snow drift, Twaddles," said Sam. "But I begin to think this road is bewitched—we seem to be finding stray belongings every other yard or two."

The children hopped out over the side of the sleigh and pulled out the sled. It was a good sled, but not new; the paint was worn off it in patches and one of the runners was a little bent. It had the name in faint gilt letters across the top, "The King."

"Now what do you know about that?" said Sam. "What shall we do with the thing? It isn't yours, even if you did find it."

"But let's take it with us," Meg urged. "We can put up signs in the Fernwood post-office—the way they do in Oak Hill when anything is lost and found. You know how, Sam?"

"Bring it along, then," yielded Sam. "But after this we can't make any more stops; we'll be too late to get the freight if we dawdle and that happens to be what we were sent for."

Bobby lifted the sled into the sleigh and the four children settled down cozily again, under the warm blankets and robe. Sam did not seem to be cold—he had heavy gloves and he whistled cheerfully when he wasn't talking.

They were soon off the cross road and when they turned into the main highway, the going was much easier. There were many cars and a few other sleighs on this road and most of them were going toward Fernwood. The four little Blossoms had been to that town before, with their daddy in the car, and they knew where the post-

office was. Meg wanted to go there first, but Sam was anxious to reach the freight station.

"Well, let us get out at the post-office," Bobby begged, always eager to do whatever Meg wanted done. "We can print the signs—or maybe the post-office man will. Then when you come back we'll be ready to go."

"Will you promise not to go away from the post-office, but wait for me there?" asked Sam.

The children promised and he stopped the sleigh before the high flight of steps that led to the post-office. It was a square wooden building and built on such a tall foundation that it looked as though it stood on stilts. The fire house was in the basement, but the engine, when there was a fire, went out of a door on the other side. You couldn't expect a fire engine to come out under those wooden steps and turn around to go to the fire.

Meg and Bobby carried the sled up the stairs and Twaddles carried the glove. Dot wished she had something to carry, but she found a way to be useful without that; she had to hold the door open for a stout old gentleman who came

up directly behind them and who almost was knocked down the steps by the sled runners as Meg and Bobby tried to get it inside the doorway.

"Thank you," said the stout old gentleman to Dot as she clung to the heavy door. "You're a thoughtful little girl."

Once inside the post-office, the children found that it wasn't exactly like the office at Oak Hill. It was larger and the windows were so far from the floor that the twins couldn't see inside at all and Bobby had to stand on tiptoe to speak to the clerk.

"We found some things in the road," said Bobby, holding on to the little window shelf with both hands when the clerk who had heard them come in asked him what he wanted.

"We thought we could put them on the lost and found board," Meg added.

"What sort of things are they?" asked the clerk kindly.

"This sled," Bobby answered, while the stout old gentleman who was writing at the desk against the wall, looked up.

"And a glove," chimed in Twaddles and Dot importantly.

"Good gracious!" the stout old gentleman exclaimed and the clerk leaned closer to the window and shouted.

"Did you hear that, Mr. Mendam?" he called. "They found a glove—maybe it is the one you lost."

"It is, of course it is," Mr. Mendam replied, taking the glove from Twaddles and looking at it closely. "Where did you find it? Good gracious, I never was so pleased—never!"

They explained to him where they had found the glove and the stout old gentleman said it was one of a pair his daughter had just given him for his birthday. He was so evidently delighted to have recovered his glove that the four little Blossoms forgot the sled for a moment. Dot was the first to remember.

"Did you lose a sled, too?" she asked him eagerly.

"Or an automobile?" Twaddles suggested, quite as though people were in the habit of losing their automobiles.

"There's one stuck on the road," said Bobby.

The post-office clerk laughed and said that wasn't a lost car.

"It belongs to Mayor Pace, of Fernwood," he explained. "He couldn't get through last night and he left the car there. His son is going to tow it out this afternoon, I believe."

"About the sled—it isn't mine," said Mr. Mendham. "I think we'd better have that on the lost and found board. Do you want to write the notice?"

"We'd rather you did it," Bobby answered politely. "I can write, but some folks can't read it."

Mr. Mendam wrote busily on a sheet of paper and then read aloud what he had written.

"Found—a sled on the Hill Road," he read. "Finder may have same by describing and making application at the post-office window."

"There—we'll paste that up and the child who is short one sled may see it and get it back," said Mr. Mendam and he pasted the slip of paper on the bulletin board which hung over the desk where he had been writing.

"I'm pretty lucky to get my glove back, eh, Carter?" he said to the clerk. "Would you believe it, I was just going to write out a notice for the board myself, offering a reward for the return of it. And here it is placed in my hand. What do you think the reward should be, Carter?"

"Something pretty handsome, sir," answered the clerk, smiling.

The four little Blossoms looked uncomfortable.

"We don't want any reward, thank you, Mr. Mendam," said Bobby bravely. "We just found the glove lying in the snow—Twaddles found it."

"But I'd like to do something for you," the stout old gentleman insisted. "If you won't take a real reward—and I had intended offering ten dollars for the return of the glove—tell me something I can do for you."

"There's the fair," whispered Meg, but Mr. Mendam heard her.

"Fair?" he said briskly. "What fair? Where? Do you want me to come and buy

things? Tell me where it is and I'll come and bring my daughter."

But when Meg rather shyly said the fair was to be given in Oak Hill and not for a week or two, Mr. Mendam shook his head.

"I'll be away then," he explained. "My daughter and I are going to Montreal for the winter sports. But why don't you let me give you the ten dollars for the fair? That will be just the same as though I had come there and bought that much."

Meg looked uncertainly at Bobby.

"Maybe Mother won't like it," she said.

But Bobby was sure she wouldn't care and when he told Mr. Mendam about Paul Jordan and his mother and that the fair was for them, Mr. Mendam, too, was sure Mother Blossom wouldn't mind.

"You put this in your pocket," he told Bobby, handing him a folded bill. "Mind you don't lose it. And if your mother, for any reason, isn't willing for you to keep it, you may send it back and I will not be offended."

Bobby put the money away carefully, down

deep in his pocket, and then Mr. Mendam said he was thirsty and wouldn't they go with him to the drug store and have an ice-cream soda?

"I never saw a day too cold for ice-cream soda—did you?" he added, smiling.

"We promised Sam to stay here till he came for us," Meg explained regretfully, for she was very fond of soda.

"He won't be long, will he?" said Mr. Mendam. "I'll wait with you."

And wait he did, till the sound of jingling sleigh bells announced that Sam was at the door. The sleigh was filled with boxes, tied on to keep them from falling off, and there was just a little space left for the children.

Sam was surprised to see them come down the steps with a stranger with them, and more surprised to hear that he was the owner of the glove and that the "reward" was to go to Paul Jordan and that the four little Blossoms had been invited to the drug store for a treat.

"Things just seem to happen to you, wherever you are," said Sam. "I wish I could lead as exciting a life as you do."

Mr. Mendam insisted that he must come with them and Sam tied the horse and went. The four little Blossoms had a wonderful time, choosing their favorite sodas and for once no one said the twins were too young to have whatever they chose. Mr. Mendam wandered off before they had all quite finished and when he came back, he had a pile of small boxes under his arm.

"Something to eat on the way home," he said, handing a box to each child.

"Candy!" cried Twaddles blissfuily. "It's just like Christmas!"

Sam had tied the sleigh in front of the drug store and when they came out, Mr. Mendam helped him tuck the children in between the boxes and the seat and cover them up carefully.

"I wouldn't have lost that glove for a good deal," he told them, as Sam was ready to start. "I value gifts from my daughter highly. Goodbye and good luck to your fair."

"Oh, wait!" Dot wailed as Sam drove off. "Wait a minute, Sam; I want to ask him something!"

CHAPTER XVIII

AT LAST THE FAIR

"WE'RE late now," said the long-suffering Sam. "What do you want to ask Mr. Mendam, Dot? Hurry up."

Mr. Mendam was still standing on the curb and Dot leaned out of the sleigh to call to him.

"I wish I could know who the sled belongs to," she said earnestly. "If a little girl owns it, will you let me know? Or a little boy—please?"

"I'll write you and tell you," Mr. Mendam promised. "Of course you're interested; I won't forget, Dot."

You see, he knew them quite well by this time —their names and ages and what they did at home and in school. He was another friend, as Meg told her mother when she reached home.

Sam said he hoped they could get home without any more exciting events and he had his wish. Good old Walter trotted along sedately and the extra load made the sleigh slip along

more evenly. They did not go through the cross road, but kept to the good roads all the way and almost before the four little Blossoms knew it, they saw the lights twinkling from their house.

"Did you eat your candy?" asked Sam as he helped them out, before driving on to the foundry with the boxes.

"Meg said to save it for Mother and Daddy and Aunt Polly and Norah, so we did," Bobby explained. "They didn't have any sodas."

You may be sure they had a great deal to tell as soon as they were inside the house and when Bobby pulled out the money Mr. Mendam had given him, they were all surprised. Instead of one ten dollar bill, there were two, and Father Blossom said it would pay almost two months' rent for Mrs. Jordan. Mother Blossom was quite willing for them to keep the money—since it was not for themselves—and she promised to write Mr. Mendam a note of thanks. She did the very next morning and it crossed a letter from him to Dot, telling her that the sled had been claimed by a little girl whose farmer father had let it fall out of his wagon on the way home

from the creamery and never missed it. The little girl's cousin, who had outgrown the sled, had sent it to her and she was very glad to have it found.

"Isn't supper ready?" asked Bobby hungrily, when they had told everything that had happened to them that afternoon.

"Ready and waiting for you," answered his mother. "But first there is something on the table in the living-room for you to look at. You especially, Meg."

The twins, who had been prevented from telling only by main force, rushed in with Meg and Bobby. There on the table, under the light of the lamp, lay Meg's lost locket!

"Oh, Mother!" shrieked Meg. "Mother! Where did it come from? Who found it? Where was it? And it isn't hurt a bit, is it?"

"Paul Jordan found it," said Dot, with satisfaction. "And Daddy's going to give you the reward to give him. It was in the snow all this time. Paul was digging out the gutter 'longside the road 'cause he thought maybe it might thaw. And he found it."

"How perfectly lovely!" exclaimed Meg, her face bright with pleasure. "Now I'll put it in the velvet box, and never, never wear it again only when Mother says to. Aren't you glad, Aunt Polly?"

"Yes indeed, darling," answered Aunt Polly, as Meg threw her arms around her.

It was lucky Meg couldn't look forward and see when she would wear the locket the next time, or she would never have been able to eat her good supper so quietly. But she didn't know, and you will have to wait with her till you meet the four little Blossoms in another book.

After the news spread about that Meg's locket had been found and that Paul Jordan had found it for her, the children were more interested than ever in the play and the fair which were to earn money for him and his mother. Poor Paul had been in bed since the finding of the locket, for digging in the snow had been work that was too heavy for him, and his lame leg pained him more than usual. Meg went to see him with Father Blossom and took him the ten dollars reward, which he was very glad to get.

When the Saturday afternoon for the fair came, the Blossom house was crowded. The fair tables were arranged in the living-room, and Norah stood at the door to take the tickets. Aunt Polly had printed these, and one of them and ten cents entitled the holder to "walk in and look around." Another ten cents would entitle the visitor to a reserved seat for the stuffed animal play.

They had the fair first, because in order to put in the chairs for the audience for the play, it would be necessary to remove the tables. In just exactly an hour and a half from the time the fair opened, every single thing was sold, cake, ice-cream, lemonade, fancy-work-table things, and all.

"Gee!" said Bobby, preparing to help Sam carry out his table, "I wonder how much we made?"

"Oh, ever so much," guessed Dot. "Doctor Maynard bought the pink pincushion, and I didn't know how much change to give him, an' he said never mind, he'd forgotten how arithmetic went. Did you see Miss Mason, Meg?"

"Yes. And she's going to stay for the play. And Mr. Carter, too," said Meg. "Maybe we'll feel funny playing with them watching us."

"No such thing!" Bobby was positive about it. "Anyway," he added, weakening, "we'll have on our animal cases."

With much talk and laughter, the room was finally cleared. Mother Blossom had managed to save some ice-cream for the players, and they had this in great state in the kitchen while Sam was putting in the chairs for the audience. Then Aunt Polly came out and swept every child who was to take part into the dining-room, and said they must all get into their costumes.

The living-room was long—it had once been two rooms—and a part of it had been reserved for the stage. Aunt Polly didn't bother with scenery, and yet no one had any difficulty in recognizing the first scene when two of the children jerked back the portière curtains.

"Well, what do you know about that!" said a surprised father right out loud.

It was the story of the Three Bears they were playing, and there they all were, the Big Bear

and the Middle-Sized Bear and the Littlest Bear, with their bowls of porridge and their beds made by putting two chairs together.

"Isn't that great!" said Miss Mason, when the curtain was pulled together again. She was so excited she never noticed she had used slang. "Who was the cunning littlest bear?"

"Dot and Twaddles," Father Blossom informed her proudly. "But wait till you see the next."

"A Day at the Zoo" came next, and Aunt Polly had planned this to give each child a chance to play. There were six animals on the stage—five besides the cinnamon bear that was Dot and Twaddles—a lion, a tiger, a polar bear, a great flapping seal, and a zebra.

Each animal came forward and made a polite little bow, then recited some verses about what he thought of life in the Zoo.

When it came the polar bear's turn, he ambled to the front of the stage with an easy lope that convulsed the audience and started off bravely with this verse, which you may have heard be-

fore. Perhaps your mother knew it when she was a little girl:

"I'm a poor little bear, I belong to the show,
I stand here and sulk, but it's naughty, I know.
They want me to bow, to behave very nice,
But I long to go home and sleep on the ice."

The polar bear, wagging his red flannel tongue, recited very nicely till he came to the last line. Then a big sneeze suddenly shook him.

"Oh, dear!" said part of him, most distinctly.

And another section of him piped up quickly, "Please excuse me!"

The audience clapped and clapped and laughed. They wanted the polar bear to recite again, but he backed off and refused to come out. So they drew the curtains together again and opened them in a few minutes for the lion and the tiger to dance a pretty little waltz for which Aunt Polly played the music. Then the entertainment was over.

The animals, still in their covers, as Meg called them, came down among the audience and

received many congratulations on their performance.

"I never enjoyed anything more in my life!" Mr. Carter assured Bobby, smiling as though something had pleased him very much.

Mother Blossom had asked all the players to stay for supper, and after the guests had gone twelve boys and girls sat down at the big, round table and enjoyed Norah's sandwiches and bouillon and more ice-cream and cake.

"Just like a birthday," said Dot, trying not to show that she was sleepy.

"Better than a birthday," replied Aunt Polly, coming into the room with a box in her hand. "I've counted the money, honeys, because I know you are all eager to know how much you have for poor Mrs. Jordan and her son Paul. Suppose you guess?"

"Ten dollars?" ventured Meg.

"Eleven?" said Bobby.

"Fifteen?" shouted the twins recklessly, guessing from Aunt Polly's face that Meg and Bobby were wrong.

"Twenty-three dollars and fifty cents," said

Aunt Polly, shaking the box happily. "I think that is a good deal for twelve little people to make for such an entertainment."

"Isn't that splendid!" sighed Marion Green. "That will pay the rent for their house for more than a month, I guess."

"Maybe they can buy a new house with it," said Twaddles hopefully.

Which made everybody laugh.

THE END